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MANHUNT

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THE MOTIVE by Erskine Caldwell

Author of "God's Little Acre"

Plus —

CRAIG RICE

RAY BRADBURY

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The Death of Me

A Matt Cordell Novelette

BY EVAN HUNTER

Cordell was in a crazy setup — he was a dead man with a borrowed gun, looking for the man who had killed him . . .

WHEN money runs out, you have no choice. You need the nickels and dimes you can grub for the warm, mellow stuff, and you can't afford to waste them for a pad. You leave the cheap hotel, and you drift to the flop-house, and then you try dark hallways, and finally you

end up in the park, a New York City cowboy with a bench for a horse. It's not too bad when the weather is mild. You curl up at night, and the stars are your blanket, and the concrete tombstones of the city reach their grubby fingers out to scratch the clouds, surrounding the patch of soil and grass, walling you in. When the weather begins to change, you wrap old newspapers around your chest and under your jacket. You stuff them up your trouser legs, and they help to cut the cold. They don't help much against the rain.

You lie on the bench, and the steady drizzle wets you and chills you, and you think *This is Matt Cordell* and the thought makes you a little sick.

And then you wake up one morning, with Autumn all around you, with the trees red and gold and the leaves rasping across the concrete walks like vagrant ghosts, and you discover you're dead.

The newspaper was stuffed into the top of the trash basket. There were holes the size of half-dollars in the soles of my shoes, and the *Daily News* makes good stuffing. I snatched the paper, and I sat down on the bench. I was taking off my right shoe when the thick, black lettering on page four hit me between the eyes. It jolted me, and I immediately thought it was some sort of coincidence, but then I began reading, and the jolt gave way to cold anger.

MATT CORDELL MURDERED

Matthew J. Cordell, the ex-private detective whose license was revoked last year after the brutal pistol-whipping he administered to his wife's alleged lover, was found dead late yesterday afternoon in the hallway of the Sunrise Hotel *in the Bowery. Police gave the cause of death as six .45 calibre bullets fired at close range into Cordell's face. Identification was made by Avery Peggett, proprietor of the hotel, who recognized many items among the dead man's effects. Police officials were puzzled . . .*

There was more, but I didn't bother with it. It burned me — clear down to the holes in my shoes. Piggy Peggett had identified the body. That made it rum dandy. Piggy wore bifocals, and identifying a stumble bum from his effects is like identifying the Sahara from a grain of sand. It didn't smell right. It was one thing being close to dead, but it was another to be called dead when you were reasonably alive and kicking.

I tossed the idea around a little. Maybe it was better this way. Drop the Cordell name, drop the whole stinking mess, drop the memories that ate away inside like acid.

Brutal pistol-whipping, the papers said.

The papers didn't know what it had been like. The papers didn't know the way I'd felt about Trina, or how much a part of my life she'd

become after only four months of marriage. It was like being hit in the stomach with a sledge hammer that night. Seeing her in Garth's arms, with the bastard's hands on her, his mouth buried in her throat. I'd reached for the handiest thing, and it was under my armpit in a shoulder holster. Miraculously, I hadn't squeezed the trigger. I'd turned the .45 butt-end up, and then I gave it to Garth. I kept hitting him, and Trina kept screaming, and when I left him, he had only half a face — but he also had my wife. They dropped the ADW charges, but the police lifted my license anyway, and Trina and Garth took off for Mexico and a quick divorce.

Brutal pistol-whipping.

The son of a bitch had gotten off easy. Just thinking about it now made my hands tremble and my head ache. All that was left of Matt Cordell was a name, and a torch that blazed a mile high, fed with alcohol. Another bastard had tagged that name onto a dead man, leaving me with zero. Sure, keep the name. Keep it, and stuff it — except that it was mine, and it was the only thing I had left, and I didn't like a corpse wearing it.

I tore the newspaper into the right size. I stuffed both shoes with it, and then I started for the Bowery and Piggy Peggett.

2.

He was surprised to see me. His face went white, and his hands began trembling on the desk counter. He looked around him, as if he expected help, and then he swallowed hard and peered through the thick lenses of his glasses.

"Hello, Piggy," I said.

"Matt . . . I . . . you . . ."

"I'm dead, huh, Piggy? You identified me from my effects, huh, Piggy? What effects, you son . . ."

"Matt . . ."

I reached across the counter, and I grabbed a handful of jacket and shirt. Piggy smelled badly, and the sweat poured from his face and down over the open collar of his shirt.

"What's the pitch, Piggy? Make it good, or you'll be wearing those glasses around your liver."

"I thought it was you, Matt. I swear to Christ, I thought . . ."

"I moved out of this flea bag three months ago, Piggy."

"I know, Matt. But the guy looked just like . . ."

"What would I be doing in your roach-infested hallway, Piggy?"

"Who stops to think, Matt? The cops asked me . . ."

I pulled him forward, ramming his stomach against the counter. "The truth, Piggy!"

"S'help me, that's it, Matt. There's a stiff in the hallway, and the cops ask me do I know him. I go down, and I look at the stuff they fish from his wallet. There's a handkerchief, too, with an M in the corner. I figure it's you, Matt. A guy can make a mistake. A guy . . ."

I released his collar, and I back-

handed him across the face. The fat flesh wiggled and shook, and Piggy's eyes went wide with fright.

"The truth, you son of a bitch. All of it. You spout any more lies, and you'll be the next guy they find in the hallway."

Piggy was shaking all over now, and the smell of fear mingled with the bad smell of his perspiration.

"Okay, Matt. Okay."

"What?"

"This guy . . . this guy comes to me . . ."

"What guy?"

"I never see him before, Matt. A stranger. A mean-looking character. A blue pin-stripe suit. Small mustache. I never see him before. He ain't one of the winos, Matt."

"I'm listening."

"He comes with a roll could choke a horse. He stuffs the roll under my nose. He says, 'Point out Cordell, the roll is yours.' I never even see him before this, Matt."

"How much money?"

"Close to three bills, Matt. That's a nice chunk of lettuce."

"So?"

"So I ask him why he wants Cordell."

"You're lying, Piggy."

Piggy began shaking again. "All right, so I don't ask him. I don't ask him nothing. He has to go, and he says he'll be back later, and he wants me to finger . . . to point out Cordell then. He wants to know how he can get to 47th and Broadway from here, so I figure him for a greenie, and I also figure he won't know Cordell from a hole in the wall. Three bills is a lot of lettuce . . ."

"So what happened when he came back?"

"By this time, I do a lot of thinking. The dapper comes back, and I tell him sure I'll show him Cordell. I take him downstairs to a wino's been flopping in my hallway for Christ knows how long. I finger the guy, and I say, 'That's Cordell.' Then I get the hell upstairs fast."

"You're a rotten bastard, Piggy. Who'd you finger? Whose death warrant did you sign?".

"Some bum, Matt. Who knows? Matt, what's another bum more or less? Matt, three bills is a lot of . . ."

I hauled off, sinking my fist into three inches of Piggy's stomach. He backed up against the wall, his face going purple.

"Why'd you tell the cops the corpse was me?"

Piggy gasped for breath. "To . . . to protect my investment, Matt. This . . . this guy looked mean. I had to follow all the way through."

"You know what I'm gonna do, Piggy?"

"Wh . . . what, Matt?"

"I'm gonna find the guy who wants me dead. I'm gonna find him and tell him you deliberately fingered the wrong man. I'm gonna beat him black and blue, and then I'm gonna send him back here."

"Matt . . ."

"So long, Piggy."

I left him huddled against the wall, his eyes saucer-wide and the fat shivering on his bones. I took the steps fast, coming out of the dark hallway into bright sunshine. I squinted against the sun, blinked my eyes. There was a long black Buick parked at the curb. The front door opened. A big guy in a green sports jacket stepped onto the curb and started walking toward me. There was a bulge under his armpit, and the bulge spelled trouble. I started walking in the opposite direction.

He quickened his pace and pulled up alongside me. I thought he was a bull at first, and I didn't want any more trouble with the cops, especially after that killing in Piggy's hallway. I kept walking without turning my head.

"I'll say this once, Cordell," the guy whispered. "There's a .38 under my arm. I know how to use it. You take another step and the worms get a feast."

I stopped and turned to look at him. He was very big, with a beefy face covered with freckles. He wore sun-glasses, and I pegged him for a hop-head, but maybe his eyes were just weak.

"What's the pitch?" I asked.

"You turn and walk toward the Buick. The .38 still goes. We'll talk later."

"You're holding the aces," I said.

"In spades. Move, Cordell."

I walked over to the Buick, and the big guy opened the door for me. I piled onto the front seat, glancing at the thin driver who didn't even turn his head. The big guy squeezed in on my right, and the minute he slammed the door behind him, the car leaped into motion.

"Do I get it now or later?" I asked.

"Relax," the big guy said.

That was all. But there was something about the tone of his voice that told me this wasn't going to be a shooting party. I sat back and relaxed, and the Buick worked its way West, nosing through late morning traffic. We turned right on Broadway, heading uptown, and finally pulled up in front of a brownstone on West Seventy-Third.

"This is it, Cordell." The big guy opened the door, and I followed him to the curb. The driver moved over to my right, and we started up the steps together. The driver rang, two shorts and a long, and the door clicked open.

"Upstairs," the big guy said.

We started up the inside steps, and a third guy met us on the first-floor landing.

"The shamus?" he asked.

"Yeah," the driver said.

"Charlie's waiting. Go right in."

They took me to the last door in the corridor, opened it, and allowed me to enter first. The room was nicely furnished, with a lot of leather chairs and a leather-topped desk. One wall was covered with floor-to-ceiling bookcases that

boasted a nice selection of books, all dusty. A gray-haired man sat behind the desk, a cigar in his mouth. He rolled the cigar between his lips, and studied me carefully. I wasn't looking at him. I was looking at the blonde draped in one of the leather chairs. She wore a woolen dress that started at the hollow of her throat, swept down over the rich curve of her breast, hugged her waist. Her legs were tucked up under her, and her knees and a little more showed where the dress ended. She'd kicked off her shoes, and they rested on the floor below her. Her head was bent slightly, the blonde hair falling over one cheek. Her deep brown eyes looked at me sleepily.

"Cordell?" the man behind the desk asked. There was an impatience in his voice, as if he resented my too-careful scrutiny of the blonde.

"Cordell," I answered.

"Charles Semmler."

"I thought you were still on Riker's Island, Semmler," I said.

His eyes narrowed, and his mouth tightened and then relaxed into a smile. "You know me, huh, Cordell?"

"I know you. How many children did you corrupt this week?"

"Don't get smart, Cordell. I'm doing you a favor."

"The free ride? Thanks a million."

"That bum they found with the holes in his head. It could have been you."

"Was the pin-stripe gunsel one of your boys?"

"No. He's an out-of-towner. His name's Buck Grafton. Does that ring a bell?"

"No."

"Does Benny Malloy ring a bell?"

"It starts a symphony. What's the tie-in?"

"You remember Benny, huh?"

"I remember him. I gave the testimony that sent him to Elmira. That was five years ago. What's the tie-in?"

"Benny's still chopping rocks. Buck Grafton ain't. Benny asked him to look you up."

"The dead bum in the hallway?"

"A present from Benny."

"A nice gift."

"Sure. It would have been nicer. It was delivered to the wrong person."

"That takes a lot of figuring. What do you want from me, Semmler?"

"A favor."

"I thought you were doing me the favor?"

"A mutual favor, then. It works out nicely."

"I'm listening," I said.

"All right, here it is. As far as Grafton knows, he potted the right pigeon. He ain't looking for Cordell any more. He'll be heading back for Chi soon . . . unless he finds out you're still alive."

"So?"

"He can find out very easily."

"I'm still listening. I haven't heard anything yet."

"There's a guy we want out of the

way. He's in the Bowery. If I send someone in after him, we'll never get him. If you do the job, we'll make it worth your while. Besides, we'll guarantee Grafton is on the next plane to Chi."

"Who's the guy?"

"You don't know him."

"Why do you want him rubbed?"

"That's my business."

"Fine, keep it that way. I don't want any part of a blast job."

"You're in no position, Cordell."

"No? What makes you think Grafton scares me? Before you picked me up, I was on my way to look for him. He'll find out I'm still alive, all right, and I'll be the one to tell him."

"Maybe, by the time you get to tell him, you won't be so alive."

"So that's it."

"That's it. Matt Cordell is already dead. The police got enough worries without another Cordell stiff turning up. We got nothing to lose. Besides, the cops ain't too interested in dead bums."

"You must take me for a meathead, Semmler. Suppose I agree? Suppose I say sure, I'll gun your man for you? What's to stop me from walking out of here and getting lost?"

"Don't be stupid, Cordell. The Bowery ain't that big. The *world* ain't that big. I could send ten men out and have you in a half-hour."

"If these ten guys are so hot, why don't you send them after this character you want so bad?"

"He knows all my boys. When the rumble gets out, it'll be like looking for a needle."

"There are out-of-town boys."

"This guy ain't worth an import job."

"What about Buck Grafton? He's on the spot, and he's just whiling his time away killing people, it seems."

"He's out."

"Why?"

"That's my business."

"When you ask me to gun someone, it becomes my business, too. Why can't Grafton do the job for you?"

"He's working for a Chi syndicate. I don't want no outsider shooting up my territory. It sets a bad precedent. Besides, he don't know the Bowery like you do."

"You've got a problem, haven't you?"

"What do you say, Cordell?"

"I say I don't work for punks."

There was a dead silence. Semmler's face went white, and his knuckles tightened on the desk top. Rage showed in his face, and I tensed myself for whatever was coming next.

"Hooray!" the voice said.

I turned quickly. The blonde was struggling out of the big leather chair. She put her feet down, and the woolen dress rode up to her thighs. She pushed herself up and weaved across the room, and I realized she was loaded to the eyeballs. She staggered over to me, stopped

about a foot away, and stood there weaving uncertainly.

"Hooray," she said. "Hooray for a man with guts." Her breath rushed against my face, strong with alcohol fumes.

"Shut up, Sheila," Semmler said.

She flicked her wrist at him. "Oh, shut up yourself."

Semmler was up and around the desk in three seconds flat. He took two quick steps that brought him alongside the blonde, and then he raised his arm up over his head. I started to move forward, but I was too late. His hand whipped down, catching the blonde on the side of her jaw. She staggered back and fell to the rug, and Semmler leaned over her, his arm cutting back and forth like a scythe. The girl screamed and tried to wriggle away from his flailing arm. Her dress rode all the way up as she backed away on the rug, showing long, smooth legs and gartered stocking tops. Semmler lifted his arm again, and I stepped in and grabbed it when it came up over his head. I pulled back, yanking him off balance, and he whirled abruptly, his free hand snaking in under his jacket. I dropped his arm when I saw the small, black .32 in his fist.

"You're playing games with the wrong party, Cordell," he said tightly.

The girl whimpered. She lay on the floor with her dress up on her hips, the lace of sheer black panties showing where the dress ended. "Charlie . . ." she started.

"Shut up, Sheila." Semmler tilted the automatic up toward my face. "What do you say, Cordell? Make it the right answer this time."

There's only one answer when a man is holding a gun on you and there's the kill-light in his eyes. It's always the same answer because life is something to cling to, even when it's a life like mine. I looked at the bore of the .32 and asked, "Who's your man, Semmler?"

"That's smart, Cordell." He smiled, but he held the .32 steady. He kept the gun on me as he walked over to his desk, opened a drawer, and reached into it. He dropped a glossy photograph on the desk top. "There he is. I want him."

"Dead."

"Dead," Semmler repeated.

I looked at the picture. It was a bust shot, showing the guy's head and shoulders. He was a typical hood, with a thin face, thickly lidded eyes, and a sneering mouth. I studied the picture, and wondered if I wouldn't be doing the public a service.

"I'll need money," I said.

Semmler reached into the desk drawer again. "Here's twenty. Don't spend it in the nearest bar. You got a rod?"

"No."

Semmler opened another drawer, and tossed a .45 onto the desk. "The clip in the gun is empty," he said. "Don't get ideas. Put the gun in your right-hand pocket."

I did that, and then Semmler

tossed two full clips onto the desk top. "The left-hand pocket."

I pocketed the clips and said, "Well, I'll get in touch with you."

"I'll get in touch with *you*," Semmler corrected. "Where are you staying?"

I looked at the girl again. She had pulled her dress down, and she was sitting up. Her cheeks were red with the marks of Semmler's vicious slapping. Her eyes met mine, and there was a mute pleading in them.

"I'd better keep away from any hotel in the Bowery," I said. "There's a joint on Fourteenth. Hotel Paul. I'll be there."

Semmler nodded. "You'd better deliver, Cordell."

3·

I had no intention of even looking for the guy. I shacked up at the Hotel Paul because I expected the blonde, and I wanted to know more about the whole rotten setup. I'd made sure she caught the name of the hotel I'd be in, and if the answering look in her eyes had meant anything, she'd show up sooner or later. I bought a jug of rye with four bucks out of Semmler's double sawbuck, and I stretched out on the bed and prepared to get reasonably blind. The knock on the door came sooner than I expected.

I put down the bottle of rye, got up, and opened the door a crack. It wasn't the blonde. I opened the door wider.

The girl standing there was tall. The top of her brunette head was level with my eyes, and I'm no midget. She was wearing a tight skirt and a sweater that pulled taut over her breasts. Her hair was long, and she owned a face out of a picture book. I tabbed her for a girl from a poor neighborhood until I caught the whiskey glaze in her eyes, and then I knew she was a Bowery fringer, and it wouldn't be long before she was one of us. She walked right into the room, and then closed the door, leaning back against it. She sucked in a deep breath.

"You've got the wrong room, sister," I said. "I didn't order anything."

"You won't get anything you didn't order," she answered. "You're Matt Cordell, aren't you?"

"No."

"Don't snow me, Cordell. The rumble's out already. Half the Bowery knows you're holed up here."

"You're wrong. Cordell is dead."

"You think anybody swallowed that hook? Me, especially?"

"Why you, especially?"

"The guy who got it was Johnny Mazzine. I know."

"How?"

"I knew him before he hit the deep skids, and I saw him before he went on this last ride. We were pretty close. Let's put it that way."

"All right."

"I know who got it, Cordell. I want to know who dished it."

"Why?"

"Like I said, we were close."

"What makes you think I know?"

"Is that a bottle?" she asked. She walked over to the bed, and I watched the tautness of the skirt as she moved. She was a big girl, but the bones were well-padded. Her legs were long and curved, and she filled that sweater as if it had been knitted around her.

She lifted the jug by its neck, sat down on the bed, and took a deep swallow. "Man, I needed that," she said.

"Help yourself."

"Thanks." She swallowed again, tilting her head all the way back, her breasts tight against the sweater, the skirt tight over her thighs, straining over her hips. When she put down the bottle, she saw where my eyes were. "How does it stack up?" she asked. A serious look had come into her eyes.

"Okay," I said. "If you like it big."

"Do you like it big?"

"I told you I didn't order anything."

"I want to know who killed Johnny."

"You can have that for free."

She leaned forward expectantly. "Who?"

"A Chicago punk named Buck Grafton."

"How do you know?"

"I know. If you want it, you've got it."

"Where do I find him?"

"I don't know."

She stood up, smoothed the skirt over her hips, and walked over to me, deliberately swinging everything she owned. "Come on, Cordell. Where do I find him?"

"I don't know."

She stopped about three inches away from me, her lips almost level with mine. She put both hands on my shoulders, thrust her hips forward.

"Where is he?" she asked.

I didn't answer. She began moving her hips, and her lips came closer. She closed her mouth on mine, and her tongue was alive, and her breasts were tight against me. I brought my hands up, cupping them behind her. Her flesh was firm, and she kept moving deliberately, moving her mouth, and her breasts, and her hips.

She pulled her mouth away, and her eyes had smoked over. "Where is he, Cordell?" Her voice was a whisper.

"I don't know."

"Okay," she said. "Okay." She started to move out of my arms, but I held her tightly, and a puzzled look came into her eyes. She lifted her head and studied my face.

"I like it big," I said. "I like it a lot."

"I . . ."

I shut off her words with my mouth, mashing my lips down against hers.

She seemed ready to struggle, and then all the fight went out of her, and she came up against me and this time her kiss was real.

4

It was just getting dark when she left. Half the bottle was gone, and I felt tired and empty. I thought of the big girl, and her boy friend, who had taken six slugs in the face because he was mistaken for me. The rumble was out now. If the Bowery knew I was alive, the town knew it. And if the town knew it, Buck Grafton would know it. And once he knew, he'd sure as hell head right back to the Bowery again, and his first stop would be Piggy Peggett. And if the Bowery knew where I was, Piggy would know. Piggy would sell his mother's heart to save his own skin, so when Buck Grafton started pushing his weight around, Piggy would tell him just where to find me.

That was fine.

I checked out of the Hotel Paul.

I took a room in a dump three blocks away from the Paul, and then I tried to make some sense out of what was going on. I'd agreed to do a rub job for Charlie Semmler. All well and good. As far as I'm concerned, an agreement with a punk is like no agreement at all. The trouble was, Semmler might not share my views. As soon as he learned I'd checked out of the Paul, he'd probably send some of his guns around. This time, they wouldn't be so cordial.

At the same time, Buck Grafton was still in my hair — and that left me sitting in the middle with my finger in my nose. It might be easier to look up Semmler's hood, put a hole or two in him, and leave him for the street cleaners. I fished into my pocket and came up with the photo Semmler had given me. I studied the hooded eyes, the flat eyes of a killer. Another idea hit me, and the more I thought about it, the more I appreciated the .45 Semmler had provided me with.

Because all of a sudden, this didn't seem like a game. All of a sudden I realized the guy I was allegedly stalking was a killer, and if the rumble got out I was dogging him, I might have *him* on my back, too, together with Semmler and Grafton.

If I'd owned a three-headed coin, I'd have tossed it.

Instead, I juggled the thugs around, came up with Buck Grafton, and headed over to see Piggy Peggett.

The fat man was not frightened this time. His eyes were wide, but any fear in them was not a living thing. He lay slumped behind his counter, the wide expanse of his shirt front covered with blood. The killer hadn't been economical. He had emptied a big gun into Piggy, and the slugs had torn away his chest, leaving a field of blood where there had once been something of a man.

The rumble was out.

The rumble had reached Buck Grafton, and Piggy had been paid more than the three C's he'd bar-

gained for. I lifted the phone on the counter, dialed "O" and said, "Give me the police." I reported the murder, and I withheld my name, and then I got the hell out of there. Fast.

Autumn is a time for dying.

The world dies in Autumn, and a part of every man dies with it. I walked the Bowery streets, and I read the faces of the bums. There was a dull resignation in those faces, a remorse in the shuffle of feet, the listless hang of a head. Summer was dying, and a park bench is a cold thing in the Winter. Summer was dying, and Autumn used a thick knife stained with red.

There had been other Autumns.

When Trina was a part of me, there had been times when Autumn was alive. Long walks in the woods, with the sound of crunching leaves underfoot. Kisses from lips touched by the wind. Blonde hair blowing wildly back from her face. And the smile in her eyes, and the promise in her body. The sumac and the birches and the wild apples, and the day high in the hills, with the world at our feet, and her body a pale ivory against the tall green grass.

Now there was only the feel of a .45 hard against my belly, and a man named Grafton, and another man with the eyes of a killer.

I walked the Bowery because it's the safest place in the world. One bum is another bum. Their rags are a stamp of anonymity. Their faces all wear the whiskey mark that makes them unrecognizable. And all at once I was tired of walking. Somebody wanted me dead. Walking wasn't going to help that any.

47th and Broadway, Piggy had said. When Grafton had spoken to him, he'd asked how to get there. It could mean nothing, of course. A restaurant, a theatre, anything that might attract an out-of-towner. But it could also mean a hotel, and that was worth a chance.

I took the chance. I used some of Semmler's twenty bucks, and I grabbed a cab because I was in a big hurry to see Mr. Grafton now. And because there was less chance of being met by one of the other guys chasing me. Subways and buses were too crowded. If we were going to play Tap-the-Skull together, there was no time like the present.

Broadway.

I ignored the dance palaces, the movies, the penny arcades, the Clearance Sale stores, the restaurants, the million and one things that could have pulled Grafton here.

47th Street.

The hotels nest on West 47th like cockroaches. Their marquees stretch to the curb, electric bulbs announcing the price of a room. The hotels all look the same. The dim interior, the small desk, the two elevators, the shabby couches in the lobby.

I started with the one nearest to Broadway, and worked my way East down the street. The desk

clerks were not very cordial. They eyed my bloodshot eyes, my bearded face, my rumpled clothes, and then reluctantly told me there was no Grafton registered, sorry.

I covered the street, and pretty soon there were no more hotels to work. For a second, I wished for the old days again, the days of the big agency, when I could have staked out a dozen legmen. Only for a second. Because I remembered then that Garth had been one of my legmen, a good operative, a guy I'd trusted.

I stopped at the nearest bar and threw off three double hookers of rye. Then I went back to 14th Street and the Hotel Paul.

I cased the lobby, saw that it was empty, and walked straight to the desk. The clerk did not look up from his ledger.

"I checked out earlier today," I said. "Did anyone call for me after that?"

He looked up, stared at me. "Your name?" he asked.

"Cordell."

"Cordell. Just a moment." He turned his back to me and went through a little stack of notes. He took one of these from the pile, brought it back to the desk and said, "Yes, a young lady was here to see you." He kept his face relaxed, but the glitter in his eyes told me what I wanted to know even before I asked.

"Did she leave a name?"

"Sheila. Just Sheila."

"Did she say where she could be reached?"

"She left this address, sir." He handed the slip of paper to me, probably having memorized it six times over.

"Thanks," I said. The address was on East 67th. I walked out of the Paul, looking both ways before stepping outside, and then I grabbed another cab. Semmler's twenty was going very rapidly, much too rapidly. But I had to keep out of crowds.

The driver pulled up in front of the address on the slip of paper. I paid him and tipped him frugally. Overtipping isn't a wise thing, when the extra dimes will buy a drink later on. The house was a four-story job, white stone front. I took the steps up, opened the outer door, and looked at the slip of paper again.

Apartment 42.

The top floor. I looked along the row of mailboxes, my eye stopping at the one marked 42. A neatly-lettered placard in the box told me the girl's last name. McKeon. Sheila McKeon. I pushed the bell button, and walked to the inside door. The door buzzed open, and I walked into a cool, dim, carefully groomed lobby. A tall rubber plant rested in a large pot just inside the door. A gilt-edged mirror hung on the wall, and a marble topped table with wrought iron legs was under the mirror. I started up the steps. The banister had been newly oiled and polished. There was a smell of

cleanliness about the place, and I wondered if the landlady knew what went on in apartment 42. It was a cinch Semmler was paying for, and playing in, this nice quiet, respectable joint.

I reached the fourth floor landing and found Apartment 42 halfway down the hall. I was about to press the buzzer when I saw the scrap of paper wedged between the door and the jamb. I pulled it loose and read the hastily scribbled note.

Cordell —
I'm dressing. Walk in and make yourself comfortable.

I shrugged, pocketed the note, and opened the do9r.

"I'm here," I called. I still had the door open. "Anybody home?"

I closed the door behind me.

The first slug tore a three-inch hole in the door jamb. I saw the wood splinter and I dropped to the rug and held on while three more slugs sent a shower of splinters onto my back. There was no sound except the small puffing noises a silencer makes. I scooted across the rug, keeping low, while the puffing went on. Three more slugs sent tufts of woolen carpeting into the air. Seven slugs, all told. An empty gun, if it was a .45. I heard the snap of a clip being rammed home somewhere across the room. I was behind a big easy chair by this time, and my own gun was in my fist. I thumbed the safety, and my hand began to sweat against the walnut stock.

It was silent in the room, as silent as a tomb.

"All right, Grafton!" I shouted. "Make your goddamned play!"

He made his play. Two more slugs ripped into the stuffing of the chair. One lodged somewhere inside, but the other ploughed through and slapped against the plaster on my right, chipping a large chunk out of the wall.

"I'm still here, Grafton!" I yelled.

He was still there too. Three puffs this time, three puffs like someone making popping sounds with his lips. One caught in the chair, hitting a spring and sending a weird whine into the stillness of the room. The second shot went wild, knocking a picture from the wall over my head. The third sliced through the chair, and came so close to my head that I heard the whistle of the bullet and could almost touch the metal jacket.

Five slugs. Two to go, and hotshot would have to reload. Or maybe he wouldn't. It all depended how close the next two came.

"Come on, you bastard, you can do better than that."

I flattened myself against the rug and waited. Nothing happened.

"You giving up, Graft . . ."

I never got to finish it. The slugs came across the room like angry hornets, fast, two in a row. They both stuck in the chair, and I heard the clip slide out of the .45 again, but I was up and headed across the room. He was behind one arm of the

long sofa, and I heard the fresh clip smack home as I leaped forward, the gun ahead of me.

I landed just as he brought his own gun up to fire, the silencer giving it a long, clumsy look. The gun went off with a pompous puff, and then I was on him and we were a jumble of arms and legs and .45's as we went rolling across the rug. I brought my fist down on the back of his neck, and felt him go stiff for a second. He had my gun hand pinned, and he brought his knee up from the floor and down again, and I felt pain lance up from my crotch in a sheet of fire. We rolled over once more, and there were two more puffs and the acrid stench of cordite.

I kept clubbing him, my .45 free now. I brought the muzzle down on his shoulder, but he rolled away from the blow, and was bringing his own gun up when I stepped on his hand.

His fingers opened, and he yelled, and I kicked the gun clear across the room. I reached down for him, and he kicked out again, catching me on the inside of my thigh this time. It didn't hurt, but it knocked me off balance, and when I staggered back, he got to his feet and sprinted for the door. I was bringing the .45 up, ready to put a hole in Buck Grafton, when I saw his face.

It surprised me.

It surprised me so much that I held my fire, and by the time I'd regained my senses, he was across the room and out of the door, and his heels were clattering down the steps to the street.

I blinked my eyes. I stuck the .45 into my waistband again, and scratched my head.

The guy who'd done his best to make me look like Swiss cheese wasn't Buck Grafton at all.

I'd have known that face anywhere.

It was the same face that had stared up from the photo Semmler had given me.

5.

I walked across the room and picked the silenced gun from the rug. I hefted it in my palm, and then walked to a closed door and kicked it open. As I'd suspected, the door led to a bedroom, a lush combination of satin sheets, brocaded curtains and mirrored walls. A long love seat lounged beside the bed, and a big S in a diamond was monogrammed in the center of the bed spread. The room was orderly. The hairbrush and comb on the dresser were neatly angled. A pair of bedslippers rested alongside the bed, prettily pom-pommed in pink. I threw open the sliding door on the closet. A Persian lamb and a silver mink rubbed furry elbows side by side. I slid open the other door. Expensive clothes, tons of them. A sable stole, a pile of evening gowns, high-heeled pumps. I walked to the dresser and opened the top drawer. Lacy panties and bras. Folded slips. Everything neat and precise, with a

small monogrammed S on the breasts of the slips and bras, and in the corner of each pair of panties. And resting on one pile of panties, nestling against a bed of silk, a pearl-handled .22.

I broke open the gun. It was loaded. I dropped it back onto the panties, closed the drawer and went out into the living room again. I went through the kitchen and found a pair of glasses in the sink. One glass still had a cherry in the bottom. The other glass, empty, had a lipstick stain on the rim. There was an ashtray on the formica-topped table. Two cigarettes carried lipsticked tips. A third butt carried no stains. A pencil rested alongside the ashtray, probably the same pencil that had written the come-on note I'd found wedged in the door jamb.

Sweet little innocent Sheila McKeon.

Come on in, Cordell, I'm dressing. Step into my parlor. Wham!

It was a fine world, with a snake under every rock, and a woman behind every bush. Trouble was, you couldn't tell the snakes from the women without a program card.

I took the clip from the silenced .45, snapped the slugs into the toilet bowl, and put the empty clip and the gun on the outside window sill, over the sunken bathtub. For good measure, I went back into the bedroom, shook the shells out of the .22, and then found a carton of cartridges in the drawer. I stuck these into my pocket and left Sheila McKeon's booby trap, after carefully placing the .22 back on its cushion of panties.

I walked over to Third Avenue and had a late supper of potato chips and rye. I hung around, watching an old Western on the bar's TV, until the big clock on the wall told me it was eight-fifteen. I figured Miss McKeon would be back from wherever she'd gone by this time, so I decided to give it another whack. I was hoping I'd scared away the nameless face for a while, and I was also hoping Sheila hadn't as yet been told about the bungled job. Her neighbors surely hadn't heard a thing — not with that whispering, silenced .45. Not that it mattered much either way. If she knew, I didn't think she'd figure on my coming back quite so soon.

I didn't ring her bell this time. I pushed a button at random, waited for the inside door to buzz, and then took the steps two at a time. This time, my gun was in my hand.

I tried the knob when I got to apartment 42. I didn't expect the door to be unlocked, and I sure as hell wasn't going to ring. I backed off against the opposite wall, threw my shoulder against the door, right above the lock. The old wood splintered and I fell into the living room, getting to my feet as Sheila came out of the bedroom.

The noise had startled her, and she'd run out quickly to see just who the hell was knocking down doors in her living room. She'd

probably just come out of the bathtub, because her blonde hair was wet, and she wore a white terry robe that was soaked through in spots. The spots that were soaked were very interesting. Her breasts strained at the rough cloth and the robe was belted tightly at her waist, outlining the full flow of her body.

When she saw me, she turned to head back for the bedroom. The robe parted over her legs, showing a long stretch of white, firm flesh. She seemed to remember the gun in my hand then, and she turned slowly to face me again, her cheeks as white as her thigh had been. I closed the door behind me.

"Good evening," I said.

"You . . ."

"I'm alive."

"I . . ."

"Your friend missed, baby. Two full clips' worth . . . and then some."

"Wh . . . what do you want?"

"The story. The full story. Why does Mr. Nameless want me deceased?"

"You don't know?"

"I don't know."

Something like cunning flashed in her eyes. She smiled then and took a step forward, and the robe parted again, and I saw white flesh again, and my eyes lingered a little longer.

"He . . . he knows you're after him."

"Who?"

"My . . . friend."

"Who's your friend?"

"The one in the picture Semmler gave you."

"What's his name?"

"I don't know."

"I thought he was your friend."

"He is. I mean . . ."

"Is he, or isn't he?"

"Yes, he is. That is, I met him a little while back. Before . . ."

"Before what?"

"A little while ago."

"And you don't know his name?"

"No."

"That's the story of the week, honey. Let me hear the rest of it."

"What else is there?" she asked. She walked to a low end table and leaned over to spear a cigarette. The wet robe tried to cling to her breasts, lost, and fell away. The blonde hair dropped over the open throat of her robe like a curtain, temporarily saving her modesty.

"Where'd you meet him?"

"Out of town."

"Where?"

"Out of town. I was . . . I was still dancing then."

"You're a dancer?"

"Exotic."

"Strip?"

"If you like."

"And you met him then, is that it?"

"Yes." She lit the cigarette and blew out a long plume of smoke.

"Why does Semmler want him dead?"

She shrugged. "He just does."

"What's your connection with Semmler?"

"I'm not a dancer any more."

"And you'd risk this sweet setup for some hood you met years ago? Why?"

"That's my business."

"You and Semmler sing the same songs, don't you? Why'd you help this character rig a trap for me?"

"Because you were after him. You took the job, and I thought you were out to get him."

"Come off it, honey. Semmler forced me into this. You knew damned well I wasn't after your playmate."

She smiled again. "You might have been." She shivered and said, "I'm cold. Would you mind if I dressed?"

"Go ahead," I said.

She walked into the bedroom, and I followed her. She stepped behind a screen in the corner of the room, and the robe came up over the top of the screen.

"Did Semmler keep his end of the bargain?" I asked.

"What bargain?"

"He said if I blasted your playmate, he'd make sure Grafton was on the next plane to Chicago."

"Don't make me laugh." I heard the rustle of silk behind the screen, silk against flesh.

"What's so funny?"

"Semmler never keeps a bargain."

"Did Grafton kill Piggy Peggett?"

She paused a moment, and then said, "I don't know any Piggy Peggett."

"Why didn't Grafton get this kill job? Semmler knew he was in town. Why'd he pick on a bum like me?"

"You're not very bright, are you, Cordell? Turn around, will you? I'm coming out."

I turned to face the wall, and she stepped out from behind the screen. The wall I was facing was mirrored, and she knew it, and I knew damn well she knew it. She was wearing bra and panties, with gartered silk stockings and high heels. There was the little S in the corner of the panties and on the right breast of the bra. She started walking across the room to the dresser, and then pretended to learn about the mirror for the first time. Her hand went up to her mouth in mock surprise. She tried to cover her breasts, and then the sheer panties that covered nothing. In desperation, she ran to the dresser drawer, hoping I'd think she was reaching in for clothing. I knew what she was reaching for; I let her reach.

It came out in her hand, the .22, its grip snug in her fist.

Her lips twisted, and her teeth showed, and a small noise escaped her mouth. "He may have missed, but I won't, Cordell."

I turned slowly. She didn't much care about her modesty now. Her underwear was the sheerest stuff, and she might have been on the runway of a burley house for all she cared. I took in the scenery because I knew the .22 in her hand was about as deadly as a woolly lamb.

"You still think I'm out to get him, huh?"

"I still think so."

"And it means that much to you?"

"There are other reasons, Cordell. You wouldn't understand them."

"Why the big act back at Semmler's place? Why the big 'my hero' stuff?"

"That was no act. I was looped, and I thought I'd finally found someone else who could stand up to that pig. It turned out I was wrong. You hired out as a gun."

"You say 'someone else.' Is there another person who's standing up to Semmler? Is it the guy I'm supposed to gun? The face without a name?"

She smiled and lifted the .22. I smiled back.

"There are a lot of things you'll never find out, Cordell. Things you wouldn't know unless you understood the politics involved. It's a pity."

I kept smiling. "What's a pity?"

"That you'll never know. A real pity."

"A real . . ."

The gun went off. I heard the sound, and shock registered on my face because it had never occurred to me she could have reloaded it while I was gone. The shock fled before the pain that lanced through my shoulder, and then the gun went off again, and again, and again, and I was falling to the rug, and the blood was streaming down my arm and chest.

I hit the rug, and the last thing I saw was the little S in the corner of Sheila's panties, and the long, full, tapering legs under that S. She ran past me just before the blackness closed in.

6.

There was a long tunnel.

The tunnel was black and cold and the walls dripped tears. There was a blonde at the end of the tunnel. She looked like Trina sometimes, and sometimes she looked like Sheila McKeon. I kept crawling toward the blonde, and the tears that dripped from the tunnel walls were red. I crawled, and every time I got near the blonde, Garth stepped in, pulling her away, farther and farther.

The walls closed in, and the tunnel was very black again, and very cold, and very wet.

And then the blonde would come back, her hair gleaming at the end of the tunnel, like a beacon light, and I would start crawling again, until Garth came back and laughed and laughed and laughed, and the blonde hair was receding, fainter, dimmer, gone.

Blackness.

"Jesus Christ!"

The voice fled down the long blackness of the tunnel, and it echoed and reechoed. I reached for the blonde again, and this time she reached back.

"Trina," I said. "Trina."

"What a godawful mess."

Someone took me under the armpits. The fingers were strong, and my head was cradled against something very soft. I felt my heels scraping up the dark turf of the tunnel, and then they bumped and bumped, and I knew I was being pulled downstairs. Street noises assailed my ears, and there was the overpowering aroma of gasoline, and the sudden shriek of an automobile stopping. A door slammed and I leaned back against the something soft, and there was a breeze blowing on my face.

And then there were many hands, and they lifted me gently, and there was a mattress under me, and when I opened my eyes, I was staring up into the Professor's face.

"Easy, Matt," he said.

I closed my eyes, and another voice joined the Professor's. I recognized the voice, and I knew what the something soft had been then. The girl whose boyfriend had got it. The girl whose boyfriend had taken the slugs meant for me, long, long ago — a million years ago.

"Is it bad, Professor?"

"Pretty bad. Four slugs is always pretty bad."

The Professor was another bum, a bum like me. He'd once been a chemist in a big drug chain — until he took a liking for the materials he worked with. He'd been hooked on heroin for close to two years before they got wise to him. They kicked him out on his backside, and he'd drifted, and he'd wound up where all drifters land sooner or later.

He bent over me now, and probed my shoulder with long, thin fingers. He peered through his thick glasses, scratched the stubble on his chin, and said, "Can you hear me, Matt?"

I nodded my head.

"Good. Whoever dished it was clean. Like target practice. All the slugs in a nice circle under your shoulder. I don't think the bone is hit. I'm not even sure all the slugs are still in you. You hear me, Matt?"

"I hear you," I mumbled.

"You want me to dig for them?"

"This needs a doctor," the girl said.

"I know, Bet," the Professor answered. "You want a doctor, Matt?"

"Can *you* fix it?"

The Professor shrugged. "It's your shoulder, Matt."

"Fix it," I said.

It was not fun. Even with the jug of wine Bet brought, it was not fun. The wine clouded my brain and dulled the edge of pain, but wine can do only so much. The bare light bulb swung over my head, back and forth, and the Professor's shadow climbed the wall like a panicky black ghost. I kept the lip of the bottle to my mouth, almost biting a chunk out of the glass when the Professor started to dig. I swallowed more cheap wine, and it sank to the pit of my stomach, and it burned and smoldered there, and the fumes reached into my head and made the shadows and the swinging bulb something out of a Dali painting.

The Professor hovered over me, with the swinging light reflecting in his thick glasses. His breathing was harsh, and there was the sickly sweet odor of the addict on his breath. His lips were crusty, and I watched a tiny bit of dried skin tremble as his breath whispered through his lips. I tried to focus my eyes on the stubble that covered his face. I watched a glistening drop of sweat slide from his temple over his cheek bone, down to the heavy line of his jaw. My hands clamped onto the neck of the bottle. I took another swig of wine, felt the hot knife probe into my shoulder. I brought my teeth together and hung on, and the room began to spin, and there was only the pain in my shoulder, and the sound of the Professor's ragged breathing, and the girl's voice murmuring over and over again, "It'll be over soon, Matt. It'll be over soon."

And then the pain suddenly subsided, and something was holding my shoulder together again. I opened my eyes and saw the Professor unreeling a wide band of tape, tightening it around my shoulder and under my armpit.

"Okay, Matt?"

"Okay," I mumbled.

"Show him, Bet," the Professor said.

Bet. The big girl was named Bet. She held out her palm and I looked at the lead pellets there.

".22's," the Professor said.

"Who did it?" Bet asked.

"A broad."

"Why?"

"I'm still trying to figure," I said.

"You'll have a long time to do that, Matt," the Professor answered.

7.

She stayed with me. She was big all over, this Bet, and she waited with me while my shoulder healed, day after day, until I thought I'd go crazy on that cot.

"They think you're dead for sure now, Matt. The word's out that you took four in the heart."

"The girl must have thought so," I said.

"Sheila McKeon."

"How'd you find me, Bet?"

"I went to the Paul. I had news, Matt. I asked the clerk where you were. He said you'd checked out, with no forwarding address. Then he remembered that this McKeon dame had been around, and that he'd given you the address. He thought I might find you there. He reeled off the address right out of his head. She must be some dame, this McKeon bitch."

"Some dame," I said. "What was the news you had?"

"I found Grafton."

"Where?"

"A crackerbox on West 47th."

I began shaking my head. "No. I went over them with a . . ."

"Registered under a phony name. I got the tip from a guy I know. I also got a lot more."

"Like?"

"Like Grafton didn't come to New York just to put the blocks to you."

"Why then?"

"Big syndicate business. Expansion, from what I got. There wasn't much. My tip was very clam-mouthed."

I sat up in bed.

"What?"

"I said . . ."

"I heard you." I grabbed her to me, every firm inch of her. "Baby," I said, "I think that's it. I think that's it!" I put my mouth down on hers, and her body came alive in my arms.

"Matt . . . your shoulder. You'll never get well this way."

"Baby, I'm well already. I'm good and goddamn well. Get out of here while I put on my pants."

Bet smiled. "Why?" she asked.

I practically had to slug her to get her to stay home. I didn't want her along because I expected a tussle, and I didn't want her in the middle of it. She gave me the information I needed, and I went to the Hotel Green, the West 47th Street crackerbox that held Buck Grafton. I asked for Grafton's room at the desk. He was registered under the name of Bob Gannon, and the clerk told me he was in room 313.

I still had the .45, and this time I was ready to use it. This time, I held all the cards, because I knew what the story was — all of it. I took the steps up fast, and then I rapped on the door of 313 with the butt of the .45.

"Who is it?" The voice sounded familiar, but I couldn't place it, and there wasn't much time to mull it over.

"Bellboy, sir."

"Just a second."

The door opened a crack, and that was far enough. I shoved it open the rest of the way and went into the room like Hopalong Cassidy, the .45 ready. I stopped dead when I looked into the muzzle of a .32. It was a familiar gun. The last time I'd seen it had been in a room that boasted a floor-to-ceiling bookcase. The gun had been in the fist of a gent with grey hair, and he had just slapped hell out of a blonde lying on the rug. The same gent held the .32 now. His name was Charlie Semmler.

"Just drop it, Cordell," he said.

I let my .45 fall to the floor. Semmler lifted the gun gingerly, then kicked the door shut behind him.

"You beat me to it, huh, Semmler?" I said.

"You got nine lives, Cordell. The word has it . . ."

"The word's wrong. But then, everything's wrong, isn't it?" I looked over at the hood tied in the chair by the window. "Like our friend here. The boy in the photograph, the lad you wanted rubbed."

Semmler smiled. "You know, Cordell?"

"I know, sure. It took me a while; I'm pretty dimwitted. But I know

now, and I should have tumbled from the very beginning. You show me a photograph, but you hold back a name. Well, I know the name now. The guy in the photograph and Buck Grafton are one and the same." I looked at Grafton where he strained against the ropes that held him to the chair. The gag in his mouth was tight, and he mumbled something that never got out.

Semmler nodded. "Buck Grafton."

"Why me?" I asked. "Why me, Semmler? I got my own theories, but they may be wrong."

"Let's hear them."

"Sure. It was all chance, from top to bottom. You knew Grafton was in town, and you knew the Chi syndicate was planning a move. That put you right behind the eight-ball, so you decided to get Grafton out of the way. You knew where I'd been allegedly found dead, so you sent two of your boys there to see if you could get a lead on Grafton. They were probably outside in the car when I rolled up to pump Piggy. They recognized me, and phoned you I was still alive. You told them to pick me up — because all at once you had a better idea."

"What was the better idea, Cordell?"

"Get me to do the job. Tell Grafton I was still alive, so he'd head back to the Bowery where you'd already told me I'd find him. I kill him, and this keeps the cops out of your hair. It also prevents any possible repercussions in Chicago. Grafton came here to kill Cordell. Okay, Cordell bagged him first. Your hands are clean."

"Right," Semmler said. "All the way. But the bitch . . ."

"The bitch went for Grafton in a big way. From way back when she was peeling for the baldies. She figured I was the gun, so she rigged a trap to get Grafton out from under — and allow him to keep his promise to Benny Malloy in Elmira at the same time. When the trap fizzled, she tried to do the job herself — and damn near succeeded."

"She ain't doing any more jobs, Cordell. She's keeping company with a bag of cement, down by the bottom of the East River."

"You found out, huh?"

"Not until today. She flew the coop after she gunned you, and we picked her up this morning. Grafton probably would have gone with her, but he still had syndicate business here. I beat her black and blue, and she told me she'd gunned you for Grafton, and that he was safe now. That was the kissoff — and I decided to do the goddamn job myself, and the hell with Chicago."

"So do it," I said. "There's Grafton. Give it to him."

"What for? It seems you ain't dead after all, Cordell."

"You want me to give him the finishing touch, Semmler?" I smiled thinly. "You'd trust me with a gun in my hand?"

Semmler smiled back, and he

hefted my .45 in his palm. He shook open his .32 and ejected the shells on the floor, leaving one in the gun. "You'll use this one," he said. "I'll hold your cannon. Face Grafton."

"A real brave boy," I said. "You cover me with the .45, and you leave me one bullet in the .32, just to make sure I don't get fancy."

"That's right, Cordell."

"All right, give me the goddamned gun." I was itching to get my hands on it, because I was going to start firing the second my finger hit the trigger. But Semmler saw the look in my eyes, and he smiled again.

"There's an empty chamber under the firing pin, in case you want to try any stunts. That means you get one free click, and then you'll have a shell in firing position. I'm right behind you, so make sure you shoot at Grafton."

He handed the gun around me, still standing behind me. I was sweating now, because I knew that after Grafton I came next. Semmler sure as hell wouldn't leave me around where I could spill to the cops or any willing syndicate ear. I held the .32 in my hand, and I wondered what I could do with one lousy bullet.

"I got a score to settle, Semmler," I said. "This is the punk that was out to kill me, remember?"

"I remember."

"Do you mind?"

"I'm still behind you, Cordell."

I walked over to where Grafton was tied and gagged in the chair. His eyes whimpered, and he made a noise that never got past the gag.

"Why didn't you stay in Chicago, you stupid bastard?" I asked. I brought up my fist, and I slammed it against the side of his face. He tried to dodge the blow, but it caught him, and Semmler began laughing. I moved closer to the chair. "Why didn't you stay where you belonged?" I slugged him again, and he shook his head, and now I was really crowding the chair, with my shoe close to the chair leg.

"Come on, Cordell," Semmler said. "Let's get this over with."

"One more," I said. "One more so that bastard can think about it wherever he's going. One more, like a goodbye kiss. Here it comes, Grafton." I lifted the .32 over my head, preparing to bring it down in a swing. At the same time, I kicked at the chair leg, and when I brought the gun down against Grafton's head, I put all the weight of my shoulder behind it. The chair toppled over to the side, carrying Grafton with it to the floor. I moved as if I was trying to catch the chair, and then I was down, too, and the .32 was pointed right at Semmler's head.

It had all happened so fast that the smile was still on his face. He saw the bore of the .32, and the smile vanished an instant before I squeezed the trigger. He fired once, and then my slug took him between the eyes. His face was spouting blood

as he sank to the floor. The .45 went off in his hand once more, and the slug went wide, and I heard a low moan beside me. I turned and saw the rose blooming on Grafton's shirt front, spilling down the clean white, covering him with blood. He squirmed once, then sagged against the ropes that held him to the toppled chair.

I looked at Grafton's dead eyes staring up at the ceiling. Then I looked at the .45 in Semmler's hand.

It was a cinch his prints had smeared any of mine on the gun. And it was the gun he'd given me long ago — undoubtedly registered in his name. I took another look, and then I smiled a little. I wiped the .32 clean with my handkerchief, untied Grafton so that he rolled over onto the floor, and then dropped the gun beside him. I ran like hell then for the fire exit, down the steps, and out of the building. When I hit the street, the sirens were piling up in the distance. I didn't stop to wait for them.

I let it go at that.

I never went back to where Bet was waiting. She'd read about it in the papers, and it'd be better that way.

She was a nice girl, a swell girl, but her competition was a ghost — and ghosts are the only things that never die in Autumn.

BY
FLETCHER FLORA

Fair Game

When Dixie died, Ray would die. And Ray had to kill Dixie . . .

THERE were lots of advantages to being the mayor's personal chauffeur and bodyguard, Ray Butler thought. For instance, besides earning you a small percentage in this and that, it gave you many excuses to see the mayor's wife.

A maid told him that she was on the terrace, and he found her there in a sunsuit that almost wasn't. She was stretched out on a chaise longue behind a pair of dark glasses. His eyes flicked over golden legs and torso broken briefly by scraps of

thin fabric. The muscular action incidental to his smile didn't disturb his face much. It was smooth and hard and brown, like the polished hull of an acorn. There was only a swift flash of white in a margin of red, a deepening toward black of eyes that were normally a shade darker than the face. A hard and handsome boy, Ray Butler. A lot of women carried him around in their heads a long time before they finally lost him in the confusion of things that come and go.

For the maid's benefit, he said, "Good morning, Mrs. Cannon. I understand you have an errand for me."

"Good morning, Ray." She swung her long, sleek legs off the lounge and stood up, stretching lazily in the sunlight. Her full, firm breasts were thrust up by a deep breath against the frail restraint of her halter. "It's hot out here. Perhaps we'd better go inside."

She shrugged into a thigh-length jacket that increased, by paradoxical design, both the coverage of her body and the impression of its nakedness, and he followed her through glass doors into a room that was cool and shadowed. She turned, then, and surged back against him with a little sound that was almost like a whimper, her face lifted and her eyes suddenly glazed.

"Ray," she said. "Ray. . . ."

The palms of his hands were damp with sweat that had nothing to do with the temperature, and he dried them in her honey-colored hair, dragging her head back savagely and talking into her throat.

"It's been a thousand years, baby. A thousand long years."

"I know, Ray, I know."

Their bodies strained for maximum contact, groping hungrily with countless tiny receptors, and after a long time she relaxed with a sigh, hanging limply in his arms. Her voice was a spent whisper.

"How long, Ray, how long?"

"As long as it takes, baby. Until I say when."

"Say it now. Say it right now."

He laughed softly. "You didn't read your fables when you were a kid. Don't you remember the one about the goose that laid the golden eggs? The moral is, you don't kill it. Not literally, not figuratively. Dixie Cannon, mayor of this town and your husband, is the goose, baby."

"Listen to me, Ray. Over half of everything he owns is in my name. It has to be that way, for the looks of it. It's mine legally. We don't need Dixie. We don't need him at all."

He laughed again, and there was a sudden tension in the sound. "That's not the point. It's not just the lettuce. Think, baby, think. Dixie grabbed me off the force for his personal bodyguard. I'm the strong-arm guy. I do the dirty work. In the last couple years I've made more enemies than any one guy ought to have, and every one of them would love to see me dead. Who keeps me alive?

I'll tell you, baby. Dixie Cannon. Fat little Dixie Cannon. God knows how he ever got the power he's got, and God knows how he keeps it, but he did and he does. He's all that stands between me and something I don't like to think about. Just one little man between Ray Butler and the full treatment. Just one fat little man who looks like Santa Claus with a shave."

He stopped, tucking her fair head under his chin, his hands moving along the sidelines of her torso, and after a while he added dreamily, "But I'm growing. Slowly, I'm growing. I'll let you know when I'm ready, and when that time comes, there'll be no question and no more waiting. We'll take care of Dixie Cannon, and we'll take care of anyone else who thinks he wants a piece of Ray Butler."

She lifted her face again to his pleasure, her bright hair hanging, and again there was the molten merging of their bodies. After a long time, she shuddered and twisted from his arms.

"Okay, Ray. Maybe we ought to have a drink to the time."

"No." He shook his head. "Sorry, baby, but I just stopped off on my way to somewhere else. I'm on a job for Dixie."

"Where?"

"Out to Club 44-40. The Schultz twins' place. Dixie's moving in."

"Be careful, Ray. I'd die if anything happened to you."

He lifted a hand with thumb and index finger tip to tip in the okay sign. "Don't worry. Nothing's going to happen to Ray Butler, baby. Nothing but good luck. The kind that was meant for the two of us."

He went out into the hall past the maid, who was dusting, and outside to Dixie Cannon's blue Caddy in the drive. Thirty minutes later he was at Club 44-40.

It was a sweet joint. Even on a day as hot as this, it had a cool, secluded look. Remote from the blistering concrete highway at the end of a white gravel drive, it sprawled with an effect of leisure beneath the drooping pale green branches of weeping willows.

Ray parked the Caddy in shade and went up to heavy double doors. They were unlocked, and he pushed his way inside, standing for a moment in the soft air-conditioned shadows of the lobby to tune his senses to the reduced momentum and volume of the club's interior stirrings. Looking straight ahead through the small lobby, he could see a litter of chairs and tables, a dance area that was hardly more than a nominal concession to active patrons. Swinging his gaze clockwise through an arch, he picked up in dark glass a reverse view of a section of the bar. The angle showed him the back of a bald head that was not visible directly, and he went over to the arch and through.

The bartender watched his approach from under heavy lids. He stifled a yawn with a clean bar rag

and shot a glance upward at the lighted dial of a clock.

"We're not open yet, Mac. Come back in a couple hours."

Ray covered red leather with the seat of his cords and leaned forward on his elbows.

"It's nice in here. Nice and cool and quiet. I'll have a Collins, I think. While I'm drinking it, you can tell the twins I'm here. Tell them it's Ray Butler with a word from Dixie Cannon."

Heavy lids flicked up reflexively and then dropped over a glitter of pupils. The bar rag made a swift swipe at mahogany that didn't need it.

"Maybe. And maybe you're Joe Blow with a bag full of brushes. You got identification?"

Ray laughed. "You're hurting my feelings," he said. "A guy gets to thinking he's known around, and then some joker wants credentials. You'd better fix the Collins and see the twins."

The bartender vacillated a moment longer between the unknown reaction of the twins and the nearer threat of a still, brown face. Then he reached for the gin. He mixed the Collins and left the bar through a door at the rear. Ray watched him go and began the pleasant work of uncovering the maraschino cherry that lay on the bottom of his glass. Spinning on the stool, he saw beside the door through which the bartender had gone a garish monster of a juke box, with bubbles rising endlessly in colored tubes. He went back, carrying the Collins, and deposited a nickel. A female voice with a cultivated sob lamented. It struck Ray as rather amusing. A fine laugh, really. He leaned against the box and heard the platter through, working at the Collins as he listened. The Collins was just finished and the platter back in the stack when the bartender returned. He jerked a thumb at the door.

"You can go on back. It's the door at the far end of the game room."

Ray nodded and set the empty glass on top of the juke box. He went through the door into the game room, and the reason for the nominal concession of space up front was immediately apparent. Most of it was utilized here, in the main business of the club. A nice layout. Better than that, it was a beautiful layout. Facilities for the works — roulette, dice, blackjack, everything for the luxury separation center. Expensive stuff. A lot of lettuce had gone into it.

At the indicated door, Ray knocked and waited for an invitation. Getting it promptly in a gutteral voice, he stepped into deep pile and surveyed three faces. In point of differences, there might have been one face less. That is, two of them were identical. They were heavy, swollen, with flesh like dough with too much yeast in it that encroached on eyes and gave to mouths a tucked, parsimonious quality. The brothers

Schultz, Jake and Theo, who had, with characteristic economy, split an egg between them. They owned the place.

The third face was a study in contrast. Though its structure was almost exactly opposite that of the twins', it achieved an equal ugliness. Long, gaunt and yellow, with a sour, twisted mouth. Sheriff Caleb Kirk. Prince Caleb, they called him. A county power. He'd bought, in his day, enough votes to elect a president.

Ray leaned against the door, palming the knob behind him, and smiled lazily. "Well, well. The sheriff himself. Glad to see you, Kirk. Finding you here will save me a trip to the county seat. It's too damn hot for driving today."

Kirk's lips twisted. His eyes were flat and lusterless. "Detective Ray Butler. Personal bodyguard to the mayor. To Dixie Cannon himself. Word's around that you're a comer, Ray. Cops don't usually work up so fast."

Half of the twins, Jake or Theo at even money and take your pick, wiped an oily face with a wad of damp cloth and blew out a wet breath. He lowered his bulk into a chair behind a desk, tugging at the tie that tortured his bulging neck. "It's too damned early. Too early for this heat."

"You never know when the heat'll come on." Ray divided a pleasant look between the Schultz brothers, his brown face perfectly smooth and non-committal. "No heat in here, though. No reason at all for you boys to be sweating. The conditioning system must have set you back something. You've got a nice place."

The other half of the twins lumbered to a liquor cabinet with a gelatin-like quivering of fat hips. "You like a drink, maybe, Ray boy? Real good stuff?"

"No, thanks. I had a Collins in the bar."

"This is good. Old stuff. Stuff like this you don't get at the bar."

"The Collins was good enough."

Caleb Kirk's long, bony body jerked violently, as if the stringy muscles had contracted in a sudden seizure. "To hell with this folderol. You didn't come here on any goddamned social call, Butler. What you got on your mind?"

Ray released the knob behind him and took a couple of steps into the room. His eyes drifted casually over the sheriff's sour, yellow face. "Like I told the boy up front, I've brought word from Dixie Cannon. It's business for the twins. You their agent, sheriff?"

"Maybe."

"Okay. Dixie said to remind you there was an election some time back. You remember?"

"Sure. Dixie got elected, like always. So?"

"It's not his own election Dixie's thinking about. It's the vote out here in the county. In case you've forgotten that part of it, this area

voted for annexation. It's inside the city limits now." Ray pivoted in a quarter turn to include the twins impartially in a deliberate inspection. "Dixie's a patient man, boys, but now he's getting a little annoyed. He waited for you to contact him, and you didn't do it. That wasn't polite. Not polite at all."

Kirk's voice intruded, rasping, grating on the nerves like sand underfoot. "What the hell you getting at, Butler? Cut the fancy talk and lay it on the line."

Ray didn't even bother to look at him. He lifted his eyes above the heads of the sweating twins and let them wander lazily along the line of junction where wall met ceiling. His voice descended to a deadly softness.

"Sure, sheriff. I'll lay it on the line. The line's the one where the city ends and the county begins. And you're on the other side. Out in the county. Prince Caleb of the brush. Like I mentioned, this is a nice place. A place like this must separate the suckers from plenty. Just like you're separating the twins from plenty. You've been collecting ice for years, and up to now it was all right, because you had jurisdiction. Now the line's changed, and it's different. You've got no more jurisdiction. Dixie Cannon's got it."

Kirk moved in on the flank. Ray could feel the heat of his breath on his neck. The sour odor of it offended his nostrils.

"To hell with the line. To hell with Dixie Cannon. You tell the fat little bastard that Prince Caleb Kirk isn't moving out for any lousy city politico. Not any whatever."

Ray moved swiftly and smoothly, like a machine, driving his bent arm back like a piston. The elbow buried itself in the soft area above the diaphragm where Kirk's ribs converged. Spinning with the motion, Ray chopped into the base of Kirk's neck with the hard edge of his right hand. That made everything easy. Catching the sagging body, he lifted the sheriff's yellow face up into a savage, cadenced chopping that produced, in seconds, a red pulp. The job done methodically, he let the body collapse and turned to the twins.

"Dixie Cannon's a big man," he said. "It's not right for a bush-league bastard to talk about Dixie like that. If I overlooked it, after a while no one would have any respect for Dixie at all. You boys ready to listen?"

The brothers Schultz were motionless mountains of frozen meat. After a few seconds, the one behind the desk lifted his hands and spread them carefully on the desk's surface. His head jerked.

"You're talking, boy. We're listening."

"Good. I told Dixie you'd be reasonable. You can always depend on the Schultz boys to play it cool, I told him. It's as simple as this: Dixie wants the ice. If you don't like that

arrangement, he's ready to buy you out. Thirty grand, he said to tell you."

"Thirty grand!" The Schultz in the chair heaved upward to his feet, his voice skidding up the register ahead of him to a shrill squeal. He stood for a minute bent forward, his fat belly overlapping the oak, and then he sank slowly into the chair again. His lips twitched in a sickly smile. "You're joking, boy. Young guys like you always got to have their joke. We got eighty grand invested in the joint, me and Jake. It's worth a hundred."

Ray shook his head sadly. "Dixie said thirty. He said if you didn't like thirty, he'd settle for ice."

"What's Dixie's idea of ice?"

"It's simple. A kid could figure it. There's you two and Dixie. It comes out a third each way, however you slice it."

"An even split? You're killing me, boy. You're killing me dead with your corny jokes."

Ray shrugged. "There are worse ways to die." He turned, moved to the door, turned again. "Dixie doesn't want to crowd you any, but he thinks you owe him an answer. He's been waiting ever since election, and he thinks twelve hours more ought to be plenty."

His eyes deserted the twins, wandered over to Prince Caleb Kirk. The lank sheriff had dragged himself into a chair, and he sat slumped there with his long legs sprawled and his body canting over the arm. He'd wiped some of the blood off his face with his handkerchief, and held the bloody cloth wadded in his hand. His eyes were as yellow as his jaundiced hide, filled with the pus of a malignant hatred. His smashed lips writhed wolfishly off stained teeth.

"You're riding high, sonny. You're riding high enough to get hurt if you fall. I'll tell you something. You better take real good care of that body you're hired to guard. If anything happened to it, you might lose altitude awful fast."

Ray studied him briefly and then went out through the game room and the bar to the Caddy under the willows. Wheeling around in the parking area, he followed the drive back to the white welt of concrete. Slipping into the tide of traffic, he drifted with it into the heart of the city. Outside City Hall, he tucked the Caddy into Dixie Cannon's reserved spot and went up a wide sweep of stairs into the main floor hall, where he caught a fast elevator at the bank. Upstairs, he got out and exercised his privilege by turning the knob of Dixie Cannon's private door.

Dixie was pink and white and plump. He had pale, silky hair brushed smoothly over a round skull, and he looked like a happy child. He possessed the natural, amoral cruelty of a child, too. The voters loved him and crammed the ballot boxes to prove it. With plenty of indications to the contrary, they

just couldn't believe that Dixie would ever do anything really wrong.

He smiled a welcome at Ray across the polished expanse of the huge desk that made him look like a small boy playing executive.

"You see the twins, Ray?"

"I saw them. I gave them the deadline. They're squealing like stuck pigs, but they'll come around. I saw Prince Caleb Kirk, too. He was at the club."

"So?"

Ray lifted his shoulders and let them fall. "He's got a nasty tongue. I had to work on him a little."

"Yes? Well, watch yourself, boy. Don't make the mistake of underestimating the devil. He's mean as a rattlesnake."

Ray repeated his shrug. "A guy beats his gums, you take action. It's bad for discipline to let a guy get away with loud-talking you."

Dixie dry-washed his plump hands, his soft mouth pursing with gentle approval. "Sure, Ray. You look after Dixie like an angel." He stood up and patted his neat little pot with satisfaction. "Well, it's been a nice, profitable day. I think I'll knock off."

"Shall I drive you home?"

"Never mind, boy. I'll make it all right. You go buy yourself a couple beers or something."

Ray made it another Collins and took his time with it. In the afternoon, he sat in a small-stakes poker game in the back room of a friendly cigar store and rode a moderate run of luck to a small profit. Later, as lights came up in the end of the long evening, he sat in his room in the Commerce Hotel with rye and water in his hand and a dark restlessness in his brain. He thought of a golden body reclining in sunlight, and, closing his eyes, he developed the thought behind his lids in vivid imagery. Myra. Myra Cannon. He pronounced the magic syllables aloud, but softly, and when the telephone rang shrilly at his elbow at that moment, he had a sudden intense conviction that she was, through some kind of supersensory awareness between them, responding to the name.

The voice was a woman's, but not Myra's.

"Mr. Butler?"

"Yes."

"This is the Cannon maid. Mr. Cannon would like you to come out."

"Tonight?"

"Yes. A car will be sent for you."

"All right. I'll be waiting."

He hung up and stood for a minute beside the phone, wondering what urgent deal Dixie Cannon now had cooking. While he waited for transportation, he mixed another rye and water, sipping it slowly until he finally heard knuckles on his door. The guy in the hall had a bullish, blocky body and an undersized head. The left corner of his mouth was lifted in a perpetual leer by a puckered scar that ran across

his cheek at a tangent. Ray had seen him around. He was called Rhino.

On the way downstairs, Ray said, "What's the pitch?"

He didn't expect a solid answer, and he didn't get it. Rhino lifted thick shoulders. "Business. That's all I know. Just business."

They left it that way, driving in silence to Dixie Cannon's suburban stone stack and walking in silence up from the drive into the front hall, Rhino keeping pace a step left and to the rear. The maid was waiting in the hall, and guided them to the door of the room off the terrace in which Ray and Myra had been that morning. Rhino followed Ray into the room, obviously on orders, and so did the maid. That was queer, a little too queer, and it was then, for the first time, that Ray had a feeling of something wrong.

Dixie was standing in the middle of the room with a glass in his hand. He was wearing a spotless white dinner jacket, and his benign face had a scrubbed, rosy look. His small mouth curled affectionately.

"Hello, Ray. You're a good boy to come so soon."

Behind him, sitting in a chair with motionless rigidity that was the antithesis of her usual seductive grace, was Myra. Her face was stiff, drained of blood, and her eyes in the startling pallor were like burned-out cinders, her mouth like a crimson wound.

The wrong feeling intensified. Twisting at the hips, Ray could see Rhino by the door at his rear. He stood there indolently, shoulders braced against the wall, his right hand resting in the pocket of his coat.

The maid had advanced on Ray's other side. Her stance, for a woman, was oddly erect, almost military, and it prompted in him a strange kind of disgust. It seemed, for some reason, a physical perversion.

"I always come soon," he said carefully.

Dixie lifted his glass and sipped, looking at Ray over the rim. "Thanks. But I had better explain why I called you out tonight. Also why I've invited Rhino and Mitzie to attend this little conference. I've made use of them, you see, and I believe in permitting the people I've used in an affair to see its finish. And then, too, it is good for personnel to be made aware of certain consequences." He smiled gently. "You know what I am, Ray? I'm a foolish, fat little man with a beautiful wife, and that's the trouble. Perhaps there is nothing quite so unfortunate as a man like me with a wife like Myra. Because he has no confidence, you see. He has no faith. It corrupts his personality. It makes him suspicious, and it degrades him. If he were like you, it would be different. If he were a tall and handsome guy, he wouldn't be forced to measures a man should scorn."

It was all clear then, of course.

Even before Dixie walked to a table and flipped a switch. Even before the sultry, vibrant voice whispered his damnation through the room: *Ray, Ray. . . .*

Dixie flipped the switch again, cutting off Ray's line, and he was suddenly a sick old man. The smooth skin seemed to darken and wither on his bones. "The machine was in a cabinet in the hall," he said. "This was only one of the rooms it could have picked up. Mitzie's very clever about operating it. For a dame, Mitzie's clever about a lot of things."

He lifted his glass and drained it greedily. "What would you do, Ray, if you were Dixie Cannon? What would you do to the guy who made your wife? As you said in the office today, it's a matter of discipline. Some things you can't let pass."

It seemed to Ray at that moment, in retrospect, that the whole day had been pointed toward this bad end, and he wondered dully how he had been so blind as to miss the signs of destiny — his own words to Myra about needing Dixie's protection, the malignant threat of Prince Caleb Kirk, all the dark signs pointing. He tried to speak, but he found that he couldn't. Bones and muscles functioned, permitting his mouth to open, but no sound would come from his throat.

"At first I thought I'd ruin your handsome face," Dixie said. "I thought I'd let Rhino cut it up for me. But then I remembered something you said to Myra. Something on the tape there. *Who keeps me alive?* you said. So now I've decided it will be best if we simply part company. From this moment, we are at liberty from each other. I will take steps to make it known that you are no longer my man and therefore no longer my concern. For example, I've already notified the men I'm presently dealing with — the Schultz twins, Prince Caleb Kirk. They were quite interested."

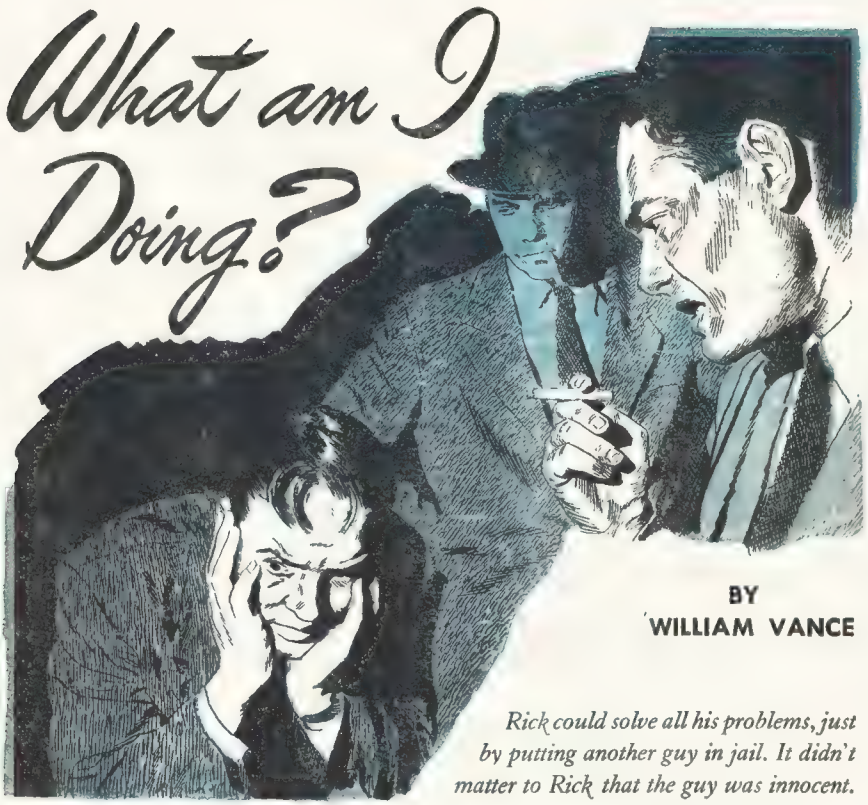
Then there was an unexpected sharp sound of splintering glass, and blood dripped brightly from Dixie's soft fingers. His voice rose to a shrill, womanlike scream.

"Get out, you double-dealing son of a bitch! Get the hell out before I have Rhino cut you to shreds!"

Ray turned away with a bleak sense of loneliness that was more terrible than fear. For a moment his eyes sought the face of Myra, but there was nothing in it now but defeat and the shadow of terror, so he gave up and went past Rhino into the hall and out of the house. All the way, hanging in disembodied suspension before him, there was a second face. It was long and yellow, with a sour mouth and hate-filled eyes, the symbol of his enemies.

Fair game. Open season on Ray Butler. He felt a frantic, irrational compulsion to start running, but all growth and structure on the surface of the earth around him seemed, of a sudden, to disintegrate and disappear, leaving no place, no place at all, for a man to hide.

What am I Doing?



BY
WILLIAM VANCE

Rick could solve all his problems, just by putting another guy in jail. It didn't matter to Rick that the guy was innocent.

We checked out at 8 A.M., left the Robbery Detail office together, and went down the corridor. Outside, on the marble steps in the gray morning, Bledsoe asked, "Going home now?"

I said yes, knowing it wasn't true. "See you tonight."

"Be damn glad when this graveyard shift's over." He headed for his car, a big man in a rumpled suit, a guy who took his job seriously.

I waited ten minutes while the morning traffic, slowed by the smog and fog, ground by; then I got my own clunk and headed out toward Pacific Highway. I'd driven it every morning for a week and each day I got a little closer to the house up the canyon, the house where Kit Cord lived. One day I'd make it.

This morning I got as far as the turnoff above the Palisades. I sat there in the car, smoking and curs-

ing, and then I backed and turned and drove home.

Leah wasn't there. A note on the table said she'd gone to the doctor. I was glad she wasn't there. I didn't even eat. I took a double slug of whiskey and went to bed.

I woke up six hours later. I lay there in bed feeling I wanted to stay there forever. There was a dull ache behind my eyes and I kept wishing I hadn't taken that big slug of whiskey before going to bed. I lay there and wished I was at forty thousand feet in a Sabrejet. Not that I'd ever been in a Sabrejet, but the idea appealed to me. Especially the forty thousand feet from the earth, where things happen.

The door opened and Leah came in with the slow, painful movements of the very pregnant. It seemed to me her fine features had coarsened. She appeared bloated and unwieldy. Pregnancy makes some women beautiful. I felt cheated.

"Time to get up, honey," she said, and walked heavily across the room to stand beside my bed. She sat on the bed and leaned sideways to kiss my check.

I was irritated, but I didn't say anything.

"Get up, Rick," she coaxed, and stood up and stripped the covers back.

I was more irritated. I jerked the cover out of her hand.

"Call 'em," I mumbled. I buried my head in my pillow. "Tell 'em I'm sick. Tell 'em I'm dead."

She went to the window, adjusted the drapes, and turned, smiling. "I've poured your tomato juice."

I felt guilty. I got out of bed and went over and put my arms around her, standing behind so I could be close to her. She leaned her head against my chest and I kissed her. I felt the soft warm outline of her body against my legs and a tremor ran through me.

She turned and pushed me back. "Poor kid," she said, and patted my cheek. "I won't always be like this."

I thought of Kit Cord, then. It made me feel guilty, just thinking of her. But I hadn't seen her in two weeks and I'm one of those guys who miss it.

I grabbed my robe and put it on and went out into the kitchen. I drank a glass of tomato juice and sat down and picked up a magazine.

The magazine bored me stiff. I looked at the pages without seeing them and I knew then that I'd do something about my problem. I had to do it. I finished my coffee and went back to the bedroom and threw everything off and stepped into the shower. While I let the stinging spray needle me, I thought about it. I thought about it some more while I scraped the dark shadow my whiskers made. When I was through I looked as though I still needed a shave. My dark whiskers are like that. I sprinkled talc on my hands and rubbed it on my face and let it go at that.

I dressed quickly. I came out into the living room and Leah had the bridge lamp on and she was sewing something blue and dainty. I kissed the top of her head. "How you feeling?"

She began telling me about her aches and pains but I wasn't listening. I was struggling with my own troubles. She was still talking, and I was still struggling, when I walked out to the car.

The lights of the city reflected against the sky. It was 8 P.M., and some of the wet wind from the west was reaching North Hollywood Hills. I got in the car and started the motor and let the oil pressure build up. Then I backed out of the driveway and wheeled the car down to the boulevard. It was 8:05 P.M., and I wasn't due at the city hall for three hours and fifty-five minutes.

I hated myself for doing it, but I used thirty minutes of that time to get to Pacific Palisades. I turned off the highway and drove up the canyon for a half mile. I turned into a driveway, between rock walls, and drove on up to a big white house that backed against the mountain and stared seaward, over as rustic a setting as you'll find on a movie set.

I hoped her husband wouldn't be home.

I pushed the button and listened to the chimes sound in the distance. A maid opened the door and showed me a lot of teeth, in a sort of knowing smile. She said, "Mrs. Cord sure isn't expecting you, Mr. Rick."

"This'll just take a minute, Marie," I told her. "Tell her it'll just take a minute." Rabbit Richard Sanders, Det. Sgt., City of Los Angeles.

She still grinned. "Come on in, sir. I'll tell her." She took my hat and I followed her into the library. I dropped into a red leather upholstered chair. The lights were indirect and restful. I could look across the rocks and trees to the ocean. Farther down, I could see the glitter of the amusement park. Straight out from me, a streamer made a string of yellow unflickering fire move across the water. I didn't see or hear Marie but there was a drink under my hand. I looked at my watch. Nine P.M. Just three hours until I went on shift. Chlorophyl would take care of it. I took a long drink and set my glass down as Kit came in, so fresh from a bath the bubbles were still clinging to her.

She smelled of shampoo, and her deep blue eyes had a lazy sort of invitation in them. That invitation was always there.

"Rick," she said in a pleased voice. She came toward me, holding out her hand. Her robe was of something sheer, pinkish, hiding nothing if you looked hard. I looked hard.

I took her hand and my pulse sounded like an alarm. "I just dropped by," I began, and then stopped because it wasn't my voice I heard. I tried again with better luck. "Just to check. See if your stickups had tried to make contact

— maybe offered to sell you back your own stuff."

She and her husband had been held up in the driveway two months before. The heistmen had got some jewelry. That's how I'd met her. I was ripe for that meeting.

"No." She sat down on a green and white striped divan and tucked her feet under her, looking up at me with eyes wide as the Pacific and the same color. She patted the seat beside her and there wasn't room enough for a toothpick but I managed to squeeze into it. "Silly. You could have phoned."

I felt her warm thigh against mine and wanted to tell her my real reason for being there, in plain, unvarnished street lingo. "Don't like to use the phone about things like that. Anyway, there's a few other questions I wanted to ask. Do you —"

She twisted her supple body and dropped back into my arms. Her face was close to mine. Her red lips were parted and her eyes were closed. She whispered, "Yes, Rick?"

My mouth closed on hers. It was soft and slightly pursed. Her arms went up around my neck and her fingers played with my hair for a moment before they slid down and dug into my flesh. She squirmed beneath me and her breath came in savage little gasps. The room grew warm, then hot.

I hesitated for a fraction of a second. I thought about Leah for a moment and then it went out of my mind, for a white-hot heat was building up inside of me. I let myself go and both of us forgot everything except each other.

After a while we rested. She sighed and said, "God, I won't be able to move for a week."

I turned my head. Her eyes still held a hungry look. "Me too." We were just getting ready for another four alarm fire when a car scattered gravel in the driveway outside. I jumped up.

She said, "Damn, it's later than I thought." She looked at me. "Go out the side door, darling. I'll let you out." She swayed to the french doors and opened them. The cold wet wind blew in and she shivered.

"You can ask me those questions next time," she said softly.

I went around the side of the house. A big black Cadillac was parked in front. I looked at the MD sign on the license plate, and I scowled at it. I went on and climbed into my car and got it started and moving toward the highway. I felt better than when I'd first got there, but nothing was changed.

I wondered about her husband, how he looked and what he thought and whether he knew. I felt sorry for him, in a pitying sort of way, and a little superior too, because he couldn't keep up with his homework. But he spoiled everything. I hated the thought of him sleeping with Kit. He was my problem. I was a jealous lover.

What a deal!

There's never a dull night at the city hall. My partner, Will Bledsoe, and I interviewed a robbery suspect left over by the evening shift. We got a signed confession. We were assigned to check outgoing buses for a pickup and we worked at it from 3 A.M. to 6 A.M., when we were called to La Brea and Norton for a drug store holdup.

We got there about fifteen minutes after a lone gunman had tied up the druggist and beat it with ten G's worth of dope.

The drug store was a chain outlet. The pharmacist was a fat little guy named Adrison. His teeth were bad for such a young guy, and he was scared stiff. He couldn't even tell us whether the guy was long or short, heavy or light, white or black. Will threw questions at him until he was dizzy as a ticket collector on a merry-go-round. There was something phony about it. A cop gets so he can smell them.

His hands had been taped and the tape lay on the floor. I picked it up and looked at it and dropped it and wiped my hands on my handkerchief. Maybe I got my idea then. Otherwise I wouldn't have acted as I did.

"Something screwy here," Bledsoe said. Will's an average-sized guy with an average-sized mind. "Phony as a three-dollar bill."

"You're dreaming," I said. "You're the screwy one. He's clean."

He looked at me. "Maybe you're right," he said. "Maybe you are."

We finished checking and went back to the cruiser. Will wasn't satisfied. "The stick-up guy took nothing but dope," he muttered.

"So what?" I asked. "That's what they do when they're looking for the stuff."

"It don't smell right," he said.

I knew what he meant but I didn't encourage him.

"If it wasn't an inside, maybe the guy will hit another one," he said. He went on, talking about knocking off the dope heister.

It hit me like a bolt of lightning, just then, as were stopped for a traffic light: everything clear as hell. I cracked a fist into my palm.

Will looked at me. "What's eating you?"

"These damn dope stickups," I said. "They're hard to crack." It was the first thing I could think of.

He nodded. "We'll nail him. He might pull another tonight. We've got to stay on top of it."

I breathed a sigh of relief. He'd dropped the inside angle.

We listened to a broadcast as we drove. Warning all cruisers and patrolmen particularly to watch drug stores. Working the percentage.

We made it to 8 A.M. without another call. We signed out and I crawled into my clunk and instead of driving home I tooled the jalopy out to Vermont and turned north and watched the side streets. I found the street I wanted and made a left turn as the light changed.

The address was a typical California residential apartment on a quiet street. Flat-roofed, yellow stucco and with a dime-sized lawn between the two wings and lots of shrubbery.

I went on back to the main entrance and consulted the mail boxes. Not that I didn't remember the address that Adrison, that drug clerk, had given us. I punched the button under the box.

It was Adrison's voice that asked, "What is it?"

"Police," I said.

The silence was growing painful when the buzzer sounded. "Come on up," he said. "Second door to your right."

I climbed the stairs and went to the second door. He was standing in the doorway, wearing a flashy robe with a towel around his neck.

"Anything wrong, Sergeant?" he asked, with a half-smile showing his bad teeth.

"Yes," I said and shoved him back into the room.

His half-smile faded quick. He stared at me. His adam's apple worked up and down and he moistened his lips with his tongue.

"You didn't really believe it'd work, did you?" I asked.

"I don't know what you mean," he said.

I reached behind me and slipped the night latch and slammed the door. "Anyone else live here?"

His eyes followed me as I moved away from the door.

"I share it with another fellow," he said.

"Where is he?"

"He works days." He ran a worried hand through his hair. "See here, Sergeant, you don't think I had anything to do with that robbery, do you?"

"That's why I'm here," I said. "Why don't you make it easy on all of us, and talk?"

"There's nothing to talk about. I swear it." He followed me around the apartment, stepping on my heels as I examined the incense burner on top of the table model television set. There were lots of obscene figurines on the bookshelves, and very few books. The drapes had a tailored look. The carpeting was chosen with an elegant eye for color. The beige lounge and matching chairs were expensive.

"What do you pay for this place?" I asked.

"Four hundred," he said and quickly added, "That includes maid service."

"What do they pay you at the drug store?"

"Well, I pick up a little extra —"

I swung around and put a bite into my voice. "What's your salary?"

"Eighty a week," he said.

"How do you do it?" I asked.

"I just pay half," he said defensively. "I just —"

I hit him with the back of my hand. His head flopped around and I hit him on the other side. He

cowered back and said, "I'll report you for that."

I hit him in the belly with my fist and then shoved him back into the beige chair. "You won't report anything." I sat on the arm of his chair and got a fistful of his hair. "You'd better start talking. Goddam quick."

"I don't know anything," he said. "Honest I don't."

I put my face down close to his face. "You don't like to get hurt, do you, Adrison? Just a little pain and you go all to pieces, don't you?"

He was staring at me like a hypnotized bird. His jaw worked a little.

"That's why you put oil on your wrists, wasn't it? I spotted that the minute I looked at your wrist. You didn't want to lose any hair when they yanked that tape off your wrist. Why didn't you use a rope? Because it'd be too hard to tie? Wasn't that it? Start talking."

"I'm trying to — I don't know what you're talking about," he chattered, and he was scared bad.

"You'll go up for this, Adrison," I said and took my hand out of his hair. "You'll spend time in jail for robbing your boss. The judge is easier on a guy that's an honest robber than the one like you. He'll throw the book at you. He hates guys like you."

His head was down and he stared at his hands.

"It's tough up there, fellow. Locked up. You don't know what it's like —"

He stared at me, a sick look on his face.

"The years pile up on you in there. And you're missing everything that means living. No nice apartment. No women. You'll die in there —"

"I don't know anything," he said hoarsely.

I stood up. "Make it hard on yourself," I said. "You can save yourself a lot of grief if you want to do it."

He put his head on his hands and sobbed.

He was getting weak. I could feel it. You get so you can sense those things. My heart began to run faster. Up to this time I'd always been a good cop. Straight.

"We can make a deal," I said, and my face was burning and my pulse beat in my temples. "Make it easy on yourself, Adrison."

I left him then. I went over to the telephone and dialed my own number. When Leah answered, I said, "Sorry I didn't call. Something came up."

She said, "That's all right, dear. I knew something had come up."

"I'll see you soon," I promised, and then asked, "How do you feel?"

Her laugh was shaky. "You know how these mornings are."

I knew. I said. "It's all in your mind. The scientists all say that."

"They aren't women," she said. "They're all men. They should have a baby."

I told her I'd see her later and hung up. When I turned around, Adrison was watching me. I went over to him and broke out a pack of cigarettes and offered it to him. He took one and his hand shook. I held the lighter for him.

"What about the deal?" he asked.

"You got ten G's worth of dope."

"I'm not admitting anything," he said. He tried to take his cigarette out of his mouth and it stuck to his lip. He jerked and dropped it in his lap and scrambled wildly around trying to keep from getting scorched. He rescued his smoke and brushed ashes from his robe.

"All right, all right," I said. "But supposing you take half of it. Just half and put it in a certain car. I'll tell you the license number, the make, and where the car will be parked. You'll still have a big slug of the stuff for yourself. And you'll be in the clear."

"Suppose I won't do it?"

"Then I'll haul you in," I said. "We got ways of making you talk. You'll do plenty of time, Adrison."

"I'll tell them about your offer," he said. But his hand was shaking.

I shook my head. "That won't help. Every time a cop knocks someone off he takes a chance on that. You wouldn't get to first base."

He stood up. "Okay, copper. It's a deal." He leered at me. "Give me the grim details."

I hit him on the jaw and knocked him back into his chair. "Get smart with me," I said, "and I'll knock all your teeth out. You can use some dental work, anyway."

He hated me with his eyes.

I lifted my hand to look at my knuckles and he dodged. I laughed and said, "All right, the car's a black Caddy." I gave him the license number and told him where it'd be parked, a lot near Cord's office. "Put the stuff behind the back seat cushion and be damn sure half of it is there."

"When you want it done?" he asked through puffy lips.

"Say around noon tomorrow. He gets to the parking lot about 9 and leaves in the afternoon."

"I'll try," he said.

I shook my head. "Uh-uh. You've got to do it. If it's not there I'm coming back for you, Adrison. And I won't give a damn whether I bring you in or not." I tapped my shoulder near the holster.

It was eleven o'clock before I got home. Leah was gone and there was a note on the kitchen table. "Gone to doctor. My appointment is for 11:30. Back soon. Milk in refrigerator."

There were graham crackers in a bowl on the table. These graveyard shifts always gave my stomach hell. I got the milk out of the refrigerator and poured it over the graham crackers and sat down and began eating. To hell with that guilt complex stuff, I thought. It was hard to put it out of my mind, but I worked at it, and by the time I finished the graham crackers and milk I felt

pretty good. That Kit dame had been all right.

I crawled into bed and went to sleep.

When Leah called me at six I still was feeling good. Usually, I feel like hell when I wake up after working nights. The way I figure, nights are made for sleep — and other things. I got out of bed. "How you feeling?"

"My doctor turned me over to a specialist," she said.

I went into the bathroom. "Anything wrong?" I called. I was busy planning my story to Will while I brushed my teeth and shaved.

"No, I suppose not. He just wanted to be sure."

"This specialist — he's a good one? You like him?" I finished and decided to wait for my shower. I went out into the bedroom. She sat on the bed, looking at her hands.

She nodded. "I like him, Rick."

"Fine. I want you to have the best." I went on out into the kitchen and drank my tomato juice and picked up a magazine.

She came over and pushed the magazine aside and sat on my knees. She kissed me and said, "You don't love me since I'm like this."

"Don't be silly," I said. "Of course I do. I love you more." It was true. I felt a sort of tenderness for her I'd never felt before. I was excited about the kid, too.

"You don't show it," she said.

I looked at her, surprised. She'd never complained before — about anything. I thought about it. "I can't," I said. "I get close to you and get all excited. And that's not good."

She got up from my lap and then sat down again and put her arms around my neck and squeezed. "I feel like I'm losing you," she whispered. "I wish we'd never had a baby."

"Don't say things like that, honey."

She got up, smiling at me. "I just feel that way sometimes. When I realize you love me, I feel better."

I felt like a heel, but just for a little while. I still knew I'd taken the right step, and that was that. I showered and dressed and came out into the living room.

Leah asked, "You're going early again tonight?"

I nodded. "Yeah. Will and I are working on a case."

"I'll bet Will doesn't show up early," she said.

I laughed and threw my hat on the table. "Okay. I can use a little relaxation tonight."

She looked up. "If you really have to go," she said, "don't mind me. I'm just contrary tonight."

I sat on the rug at her feet and leaned my head against her knees. "No," I said. "No, you're not."

Her hand ruffled my hair.

We watched the fights on television and she made some coffee. She fell asleep in her chair about ten-thirty, while I sipped coffee and looked at a chase program. I carried her to bed and covered her. She didn't wake when I kissed her.

I got my hat and went out to the car. I got the car started and drove straight to the city hall.

Will Bledsoe met me in the corridor. "Let's get a cup of coffee," he said.

We went across the street to the diner and the girl brought coffee. I lit a cigarette and said, "Will, I got a lead on our stickup."

He looked at me quickly and shoved his hat on the back of his head. "Working overtime?" he grunted. He's always grouchy on the midnight to 8 a.m. just like me.

"I got a tip from a stoolie," I said. "There's a doctor in the deal. Fellow named Cord. Drives a black Caddy. We ought to look it over."

"Got to be careful with these docs. You're in trouble if you're wrong about 'em." Frowning, he asked, "How reliable is this pigeon of yours?"

"He's batted a thousand up to now," I said.

He didn't lose his frown. "Who's this stoolie, Rick?"

"Don't ask me," I said. "I wouldn't tell my own mother."

"Drop dead," he said, and threw twenty cents on the counter and stood up. "Let's go."

I followed him out to the sidewalk. "Let the day shift knock this guy off tomorrow morning," I said. "Let's do it that way."

"Why don't we do it now?" he wanted to know.

"It might put the finger on my man. I wouldn't want to lose him."

"What about the others?" he asked. "What about them, Rick?"

I moved my shoulders. "He just fingered Cord. Maybe we can get the rest out of the quack after we make the pinch."

"I'd have sworn that guy Adrison was in on it," Will said. "Oh, well. Let's check in, Rick."

There's a lot of crime in Los Angeles. If you don't believe it read a newspaper. Or the police blotter. I spent the next eight hours with Will, being a cop in a busy city. I didn't have much time to think about things. I didn't want to think about things. We checked out at 8 a.m. and I drove home.

I parked the car in the driveway and got out and started for the house. The woman next door stepped out of her front door like she'd been waiting for me. She called to me but I knew she had something for me before she called.

I went toward her and my heart was bouncing all over Southern California.

She yelled, "Your wife is in the hospital. She left a few minutes ago."

"Why didn't someone call me?" I yelled back, swallowing my heart. I turned and ran to the car, hearing her say something about I'd just left when they called. The car wouldn't start. I didn't have the key on. I didn't have the key in the lock. I ripped a pocket trying to find the key. I got the car started and whipped out the driveway.

As I drove I wished I had a police escort. I drove as if I did have one, and at the boulevard I got my wish.

Will Bledsoe, in a traffic cruiser, with light and siren going, made a U turn and led me on. I put it in the company notch and whipped into the emergency entrance at the hospital six and a half minutes later. I leaped out of the car and charged through the doorway, bowled an interne out of the way, and a long-faced nurse said, "Maternity ward, seventh floor."

She put on the brakes as I pushed along behind her to the express. I was lifted to the seventh and got out and raced down the corridor. I got there just in time to see Leah going into the delivery room. She was moaning and turning her head from side to side.

The long-faced nurse said, "This way to the waiting room, Mr. Sanders. And take it easy."

I was panting like I'd been running. I went into the waiting room. Four or five guys lounged around, smoking, joking and taking it easy. I hated all of them. I turned my back on them.

Will came leisurely into the room, jingling my keys. "You left your motor running," he said.

"To hell with the motor," I said. My voice was hoarse.

"Jeez, I never seen a guy run like you," Will said.

I told him to go to hell.

"Take it easy," he said.

I put both my hands up to my head. "Christ," I said. "Jesus H. Christ and all his disciples. Every bastard in the joint tells me to take it easy."

He pulled me out of the waiting room and down the hall, and slipped a coin in the coke machine. A bottle came sliding out and Will opened it and gave it to me. He put in another coin and got one for himself. "You'll be surprised, Rick, how this'll change your home life."

I looked at him with a question mark on my forehead.

"It's kids," he said. "You and Leah alone—that's one thing. When you have a kid it changes everything. Dirty diapers. They stink, Rick. And bottle warmers on your bedside table. And baby gear all over the place."

I scowled at him. "What's wrong with baby gear everywhere? The kid's got to live, same as me."

He sighed heavily. "Yeah, yeah. I know. But no more nights out on the town, partner. And every time you turn around you're asking yourself a question."

"Like what?"

"Like, how is this going to affect my kids? What'll my kids think of this and that? Things like that, Rick. You'll learn."

I sipped the coke slowly and I put the bottle back in the case and walked to the end of the hall and looked out over the city. My city. The city that paid me dough to protect its people.

Will was standing in back of me.

"What's wrong, Rick?" he said.

The nurse stopped me from saying anything. She said, "A seven-pound boy, Mr. Sanders."

Will was shaking my hand as I asked the nurse, "How's she? Can I see her? Can I see him?"

"You can see your wife for a few minutes," the nurse said. "They're taking care of the baby." She swished away.

I was halfway to the room before Will could get his hand out of mine. I walked through the door and Leah lay on the bed, her face white and drawn, her eyes closed. She was different.

There was no bulge in the covers. She looked slim again and as I stood there she opened her eyes and looked up at me and smiled. She put her hand out and took my hand and said, "It's all over now, Rick. It didn't hurt a bit."

"My God," I said.

I was outside the hospital, somehow or other. Will had let the traffic car go and he was standing on the steps smoking a cigarette.

"Feel better?" he asked.

I nodded. I said, "Sometimes a guy can make a mistake, Will — but it's all right if he catches it in time. Remember what you said about Adrison?"

He looked at me for a minute, and then he nodded. "Yeah. I figured it for an inside job."

"It was." I looked at my watch. It stood at 10:35 A.M. There would be time to get to the parking lot just about the time Adrison showed. "Let's make the pinch, Will. I know where." Adrison would scream like hell when we took him, and accuse me plenty, but then half of them do that.

Will continued to look at me, still not moving. "This stoolie of yours — that where you got it?"

"Hell, no," I said. "I got this right from the guy himself."

"Let's go," Will said. We ran down the steps to my car.

Accident Report

A cop was dead. The machinery of the hunt started to move. But there just wasn't a clue to be turned up . . .

BY RICHARD MARSTEN

THERE was a blanket thrown over the patrolman by the time we got there. The ambulance was waiting, and a white-clad interne was standing near the step of the ambulance, puffing on a cigarette.

He looked up as I walked over to him, and then flicked his cigarette away.

"Detective-Sergeant Jonas," I said.

"How do you do?" the interne answered. "Dr. Mallaby."

"What's the story?"

"Broken neck. It must have been a big car. His chest is caved in where he was first hit. I figure he was knocked down, and then run over. The bumper probably broke his neck. That's the cause of death, anyway."

Andy Larson walked over to where we were standing. He shook his head and said, "A real bloody one, Mike."

"Yeah." I turned to the interne. "When was he hit?"

"Hard to say. No more than a

half-hour ago. I'd guess offhand. An autopsy will tell."

"That checks, Mike," Andy said. "Patrolman on the beat called it in about twenty-five minutes ago."

"A big car, huh?"

"I'd say so." the interne answered.

"I wonder how many big cars there are in this city?"

Andy nodded. "You can cart him away, Doc," he said. "The boys are through with their pictures."

The interne fired another cigarette, and we watched while he and an attendant put the dead patrolman on a stretcher and then into the ambulance. The interne and the attendant climbed aboard, and the ambulance pulled off down the street. They didn't use the siren. There was no rush now.

A cop gets it, and you say, "Well, gee, that's tough. But that was his trade." Sure. Except that being a cop doesn't mean you don't have a wife, and maybe a few kids. It doesn't hurt any less, being a cop. You're just as dead.

I went over the accident report with Andy.

ACCIDENT NUMBER	SURNAME
46A-3	Benson

FIRST NAME AND INITIALS
James C.
PRECINCT NO. 032

AIDED NUMBER	ADDRESS
67-4	1812 Crescent Ave.
SEX	AGE
M	28

My eyes skipped down the length of the card, noting the date, time, place of occurrence.

NATURE OF ILLNESS OR INJURY	FATAL ✓
Hit and run	SERIOUS
	SLIGHT
	UNKNOWN

I kept reading, down to the circled items on the card that told me the body had been taken to the morgue and claimed already. The rest would have been routine in any other case, but it was slightly ironic here.

TRAFFIC CONTROLLED BY OFFICER?
NAME Ptm. James C. Benson
SHIELD NO. 3685
TRAFFICE CONTROLLED BY LIGHTS?
Yes
COMMAND Traffic Division
LIGHTS IN OPERATION? Yes

I read the rest of the technical information about the direction of the traffic moving on the lights, the police action taken, the city involved, and then flipped the card over. Under NAMES AND ADDRESSES OF WITNESSES (IF NONE, SO STATE) the single word "None" was scribbled. The officer who'd reported the hit and run was Patrolman P. Margolis. He'd been making the rounds, stopped for his usual afternoon chat with Benson, and had found the traffic cop dead in the gutter. There were skid marks on the asphalt street, but there hadn't been a soul in sight.

"How do you figure it, Andy?" I asked.

"A few ideas."

"Let's hear them."

"The guy may have done something wrong. Benson may have hailed him for something entirely different. The guy panicked and cut him down."

"Something wrong like what?"

"Who knows? Hot furs in the trunk. Dead man in the back seat. You know."

"And you figure Benson hailed him because he was speeding, or his windshield wiper was crooked? Something like that?"

"Yeah, you know."

"I don't buy it, Andy."

"Well, I got another idea."

"What's that? Drunk?"

Andy nodded.

"That's what I was thinking. Where do we start?"

"I've already had a check put in on stolen cars, and the lab boys are going over the skid marks. Why don't we go back and see if we can scare up any witnesses?"

I picked my jacket off the back of the chair, buttoned it on, and then adjusted my shoulder clip. "Come on."

The scene of the accident was at the intersection of two narrow streets. There was a two-family stucco house on one corner, and empty lots on the other three corners. It was a quiet intersection, and the only reason it warranted a light was the high school two blocks away. A traffic cop was used to supplement the light in the morning and afternoon when the kids were going to and coming from school. Benson had been hit about ten minutes before classes broke. It was a shame, because a bunch of homebound kids might have saved his life — or at least provided some witnesses.

"There's not much choice," Andy said.

I looked at the stucco house. "No, I guess not. Let's go."

We climbed the flat, brick steps at the front of the house, and Andy pushed the bell button. We waited for a few moments, and then the door opened a crack, and a voice asked, "Yes?"

I flashed my buzzer. "Police officers," I said. "We'd like to ask a few questions."

The door stayed closed, with the voice coming from behind the small crack. "What about?"

"Accident here yesterday. Won't you open the door?"

The door swung wide, and a thin young kid in his undershirt peered out at us. His brows pulled together in a hostile frown. "You got a search warrant?" he asked.

"What have you got to hide, sonny?" Andy asked.

"Nothing. I just don't like cops barging in like storm troopers."

"Nobody's barging in on you," Andy said. "We want to ask a few questions, that's all. You want to get snotty about it, we'll go get a goddamned search warrant, and then you'd better hold onto your head."

"All right, what do you want?"

"You changed your song, huh, sonny?"

"Leave it be, Andy," I said. "Were you home this afternoon, son?"

"Yeah."

"All afternoon?"

"Yeah."

"You hear any noise out here in the street?"

"What kind of noise?"

"You tell me."

"I didn't hear any noise."

"A car skidding, maybe? Something like that?"

"No."

"Did you *see* anything unusual?"

"I didn't see anything. You're here about the cop who was run over, ain't you?"

"That's right, son."

"Well, I didn't see anything."

"You live here alone?"

"No. With my mother."

"Where is she?"

"She ain't feeling too good. That's why I've been staying home from school. She's been sick in bed. She didn't hear anything, either. She's in a fog."

"Have you had the doctor?"

"Yeah, she'll be all right."

"Where's your mother's room?"

"In the back of the house. She couldn't have seen anything out here even if she was able to. You're barking up the wrong tree."

"How long you been out of school, son?"

"Why?"

"How long?"

"A month."

"Your mother been sick that long?"

"Yeah."

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen."

"You better get back to school," Andy said. "Damn fast. Tell the city about your mother, and they'll do something for her. You hear that?"

"I hear it."

"We'll send someone around to check tomorrow. Remember that, sonny."

"I'll remember it," the kid said, a surly look on his face.

"Anybody else live here with you?"

"Yeah. My dog. You want to ask him some questions, maybe?"

I saw Andy clench his fists, so I said, "That'll be all, son. Thanks."

"For what?" the kid asked, and then he slammed the door.

"That lousy snot-nose," Andy said. "That little son of a . . ."

"Come on," I said. We started down, and I looked at the empty lots on the other corners. Then I turned back to take a last look at the house. "There's nothing more here," I said. "We better get back."

There were thirty-nine cars stolen in New York City that day. Of the bigger cars, two were Buicks, four Chryslers, and one Cadillac. One of the Chryslers was stolen from a neighborhood about two miles from the scene of the accident.

"How about that?" Andy asked.

"How about it?"

"The guy stole the buggy and when Benson hailed him, he knew he was in hot water. He cut him down."

"*If* Benson hailed him."

"Maybe Benson only stuck up his hand to stop traffic. The guy misunderstood, and crashed through."

"We'll see," I said.

We checked with the owner of the Chrysler. She was a fluttery woman who was obviously impressed with the fact that two policemen were calling on her personally about her missing car.

"Well, I never expected such quick action," she said. "I mean, *really*."

"The car was a Chrysler, ma'm?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," she said, nodding her head emphatically. "We've never owned anything but a Chrysler."

"What year, ma'm?"

"I gave all this information on the phone," she said.

"I know, ma'm. We're just checking it again."

"A new car. 1953."

"The color?"

"Blue. A sort of robin's egg blue, do you know? I told that to the man who answered the phone."

"License number?"

"Oh, again? Well, just a moment." She stood up and walked to the kitchen, returning with her purse. She fished into the purse, came up with a wallet, and then rummaged through that for her registration. "Here it is," she said.

"What, ma'm?"

"7T 8458."

Andy looked up. "That's a Nassau County plate, ma'm."

"Yes. Yes, I know."

"In the Bronx? How come?"

"Well . . . oh, you'll think this is silly."

"Let's hear it, ma'm."

"Well, a Long Island plate is so much more impressive. I mean — well, we plan on moving there soon anyway."

"And you went all the way to Nassau to get a plate?"

"Yes."

Andy coughed politely. "Well, maybe that'll make it easier."

"Do you think you'll find the car?"

"We certainly hope so, ma'm."

We found the car that afternoon. It was parked on a side street in Brooklyn. It was in perfect condition, no damage to the front end, no blood anywhere on the grille or bumper. The lab checked the tires against the skid marks. Negative. This, coupled with the fact that the murder car would undoubtedly have sustained injuries after such a violent smash, told us we'd drawn a blank. We returned the car to the owner.

She was very happy.

By the end of the week, we'd recovered all but one of the stolen cars. None of them checked with what we had. The only missing car

was the Cadillac. It had been swiped from a parking lot in Queens, with the thief presenting the attendant with a ticket for the car. The m.o. sounded professional, whereas the car kill looked like a fool stunt. When another Caddy was stolen from a lot in Jamaica, with the thief using the same *modus operandi*, we figured it for a ring, and left it to the Automobile Squad.

In the meantime, we'd begun checking all auto body and fender repair shops in the city. We had just about ruled out a stolen car by this time, and if the car was privately owned, the person who'd run down Benson would undoubtedly try to have the damage to his car repaired.

The lab had reported finding glass slivers from a sealbeam imbedded in Benson's shirt, together with chips of black paint. From the position of the skid marks, they estimated that he'd been hit by the right side of the car, and they figured the broken light would be on that side, together with the heaviest damage to the grille.

Because Andy still clung to the theory that the driver had been involved in something fishy just before he hit Benson, we checked with the local precinct squads for any possibly related robberies or burglaries, and we also checked with the Safe, Loft and Truck Squad. There'd been a grocery store holdup in the neighboring vicinity on the day of the hit and run, but the thief had already been apprehended, and he was driving a '37 Ford. Both headlights were intact, and any damage to the grille had been sustained years ago.

We continued to check on repair shops.

When the Complaint Report came in, we leaped on it at once. We glossed over the usual garbage in the heading, and skipped down to the DETAILS:

Telephone message from one Mrs. James Dailey, owner and resident of private dwelling at 2389 Barnes Avenue. Dispatched Radio Motor Patrol #761. Mrs. Dailey returned from two-week vacation to find picket fence around house smashed in on Northwest corner. Tire marks in bed of irises in front yard indicate heavy automobile or light truck responsible for damage. Black paint discovered on damaged pickets. Good tire marks in wet mud of iris bed, casts made. Tire size 7.60-15. 4-ply. Estimated weight 28 pounds. Further investigation of tread marks disclosed tire to be Sears, Roebuck and Company, registered trademark Allstate Tires. Catalog number 95K 01227K. Case still active pending receipt of reports and further investigation.

"You can damn well bet it's still active," Andy said. "This may be it, Mike."

"Maybe," I said.

It wasn't. The tire was a very popular seller, and the mail order house sold thousands of them every year, both through the mails and over the counter. It was impossible to check over-the-counter sales, and a check

of mail-order receipts revealed that no purchases had been made within a two-mile radius of the hit and run. We extended the radius, checked on all the purchasers, and found no suspicious-looking automobiles, although all of the cars were big ones. There was one black car in the batch — and there wasn't a scratch on it.

But Mrs. Dailey's house was about ten blocks from the scene of the killing, and that was too close for coincidence. We checked out a car and drove over.

She was a woman in her late thirties, and she greeted us at the door in a loose housecoat, her hair up in curlers.

"Police officers," I said.

Her hand went to her hair, and she said, "Oh, my goodness." She fretted a little more about her appearance, belted the housecoat tighter around her waist, and then said, "Come in, come in."

We questioned her a little about the fence and the iris bed, got substantially what was in the Complaint Report, and then went out to look at the damage. She stayed in the house, and when she joined us later, she was wearing tight black slacks and a chartreuse sweater. She'd also tied a scarf around her hair, hiding the curlers.

The house was situated on a corner, with a side street intersecting Barnes Avenue, and then a gravel road cutting into another intersection. The tire marks seemed to indicate the car had come down the gravel road, and then backed up the side street, knocking over the picket fence when it did. It all pointed to a drunken driver.

"How does it look?" she asked.

"We're working on it," Andy said. "Any of your neighbors witness this?"

"No. I asked around. No one saw the car. They heard the crash, came out and saw the damaged fence, but the car had gone already."

"Was anything missing from your house or yard?"

"No. It was locked up tight. We were on vacation, you know."

"What kind of a car does your husband drive, ma'm?"

"A '48 Olds. Why?"

"Just wondering."

"Let's amble up the street, Mike," Andy said. "Thank you very much, ma'm."

We got into the car, and Mrs. Dailey watched us go, striking a pretty pose in the doorway of her house. I looked back and saw her wave at one of her neighbors, and then she went inside.

"Where to?" I asked Andy.

"There's a service station at the end of that gravel road, on the intersection. If the car came up that road, maybe he stopped at the station for gas. We've got nothing to lose."

We had nothing to gain, either. They'd gassed up a hundred big black cars every day. They didn't remember anything that looked out of line. We thanked them, and

stopped at the nearest diner for some coffee. The coffee was hot, but the case sure as hell wasn't.

It griped us. It really griped us. Some son of a bitch had a black car stashed away in his garage. The car had a damaged front end, and it may still have had blood stains on it. If he'd been a drunken driver, he'd sure as hell sobered up fast enough — and long enough to realize he had to keep that car out of sight. We mulled it over, and we squatted on it, and we were going over all the angles again when the phone rang.

I picked it up. "Jonas here."

"Mike, this is Charlie on the desk. I was going to turn this over to Complaint, but I thought you might like to sit in on it."

"Tie in with the Benson kill?"

"Maybe."

"I'll be right down." I hung up quickly. "Come on, Andy."

We went downstairs to the desk, and Charlie introduced us to a Mr. George Sullivan and his daughter Grace, a young kid of about sixteen. We took them into an empty office, leaving Charlie at the desk.

"What is it, Mr. Sullivan?" I asked.

"I want better protection," he said.

"Of what, sir?"

"My child. Grace here. All the kids at the high school, in fact."

"What happened, sir?"

"You tell him, Grace."

The kid was a pretty blond, fresh and clean-looking in a sweater and skirt. She wet her lips and said, "Daddy, can't . . ."

"Go on, Grace, it's for your own good."

"What is it, Miss?" Andy asked gently.

"Well . . . "

"Go on, Grace. Just the way you told it to me. Go on."

"Well, it was last week. I . . ."

"Where was this, Miss?"

"Outside the high school. I cut my last period, a study hour. I wanted to do some shopping downtown, and anyway a study hour is nowhere. You know, they're not so strict if you cut one."

"Yes, Miss."

"I got out early, about a half-hour before most of the kids start home. I was crossing the street when this car came around the corner. I got onto the sidewalk, and the car slowed down and started following me."

"What kind of a car, Miss?"

"A big, black one."

"Did you notice the year and make?"

"No. I'm not so good at cars."

"All right, what happened?"

"Well, the man driving kept following me, and I started walking faster, and he kept the car even with me all the time. He leaned over toward the window near the curb and said, 'Come on, sweetheart, let's go for a ride.' " She paused. "Daddy, do I have to . . . "

"Tell them all of it, Grace."

She swallowed hard, and then stared down at her saddle shoes.

"I didn't answer him. I kept walking, and he pulled up about ten feet ahead of me, and sat waiting there. When I came up alongside the car, he opened the door and got out. He . . . he . . . made a grab for me and . . . and I screamed."

"What happened then?"

"He got scared. He jumped into the car and pulled away from the curb. He was going very fast. I stopped screaming after he'd gone because . . . because I didn't want to attract any attention."

"When was this, Miss?"

"Last week."

"What day?"

"It was Wednesday," Mr. Sullivan put in. "She came home looking like hell, and I asked her what was wrong, and she said nothing. I didn't get the story out of her until today."

"You should have reported this earlier, Miss," Andy said.

"I . . . I was too embarrassed."

"Did you notice the license plate on the car?"

"Yes."

"Did you get the number?"

"No. It was a funny plate."

"How do you mean funny?"

"It was a New York plate, but it had a lot of lettering on it."

"A lot of lettering? Was it a suburban plate? Was the car a station wagon?"

"No, it wasn't."

"A delivery truck?"

"No, it was a regular car. A new one."

"A new car," I repeated.

"Are you going to do something about this?" Mr. Sullivan asked.

"We're going to try, sir. Did you get a good look at the man, Miss?"

"Yes. He was old. And fat. He wore a brown suit."

"How old would you say, Miss?"

"At least forty."

Mr. Sullivan smiled, and then the smile dropped from his face. "There should be a cop around there. There definitely should be."

"Would you be able to identify the man if we showed him to you?"

"Yes, but . . . do I have to? I mean, I don't want any trouble. I don't want the other kids to find out."

"No one will find out, Miss."

"This wouldn't have happened if there was a cop around," Mr. Sullivan said.

"There was a cop," I told him. "He's dead."

When they left, we got some coffee and mulled it over a bit more.

"A new car," Andy said.

"With a funny plate. What the hell did she mean by a funny plate?"

"On a new car."

I stood up suddenly. "I'll be dipped!" I said.

"What?"

"A new car, Andy. A funny plate. A New York plate with lettering on it. For Christ's sake, it was a *dealer's* plate!"

Andy snapped his fingers. "Sure. That explains how the bastard kept the car hidden so well. It's probably on some goddamn garage floor, hidden behind the other cars in the showroom."

"Let's go, Andy," I said.

It wasn't difficult. It's tough to get a dealer's franchise, and there aren't very many dealers in any specific neighborhood. We tried two, and we hit the jackpot on the third try.

We spotted the car in one corner of the big garage. We walked over to it, and there was a mechanic in grease-stained coveralls working on the right headlight.

"Police," I told him. "What's wrong there?"

He continued working, apparently used to periodic checks from the Automobile Squad. "Sealbeam is broken. Just replacing it."

"What happened to the grille?"

"Oh, a small accident. Damn shame, too. A new car."

Andy walked around to the back and saw the paint scratches on the trunk. He nodded when he came around to me again.

"Back's all scratched, too," he said to the mechanic.

"Yeah, this goddamn car's been a jinx ever since we got it in."

"How so?"

"Got a headache with this one. The day we took it out for a test, the fool driver ran it into a ditch. Sliced hell out of both rear tires, and we had to replace them. All this in the first week we had this pig."

"Did you replace with Allstate?" I asked.

The mechanic looked up in surprise. "Why, yeah. Say, how did you know?"

"Where's your boss?" Andy asked.

"In the front office." The mechanic got up. "Hey, what's this all about?"

"Nothing that concerns you, Mac. Fix your car."

We went to the front office, a small cubicle that held two desks and two leather customer chairs. A stout man was sitting at one desk, a telephone to his ear. I estimated his age at about forty-two, forty-three.

He looked up and smiled when we came in, nodded at us, and then continued talking.

"Yes . . . well, okay, if you say so. Well look, Sam, I can't sell cars if I haven't got them . . . You just do your best, that's all. Okay, fine." He hung up without saying goodbye, got out of his chair and walked over to us.

"Can I help you gentlemen?"

"Yes," Andy said. "We're interested in a car. Are you the owner of this place?"

"I am."

"With whom are we doing business?"

"Fred Whitaker," he said. "Did you have any particular car in mind?"

"Yes. The black Buick on the floor."

"A beautiful car," Whitaker said, smiling.

"The one with the smashed grille and headlight," I added.

The smile froze on his face, and he went white. "Wh . . . what?"

"Did you smash that car up?"

Whitaker swallowed hard. "No . . . no. One of my mechanics did it."

"Who?"

"I've . . . I've fired him. He . . . "

"We can check this, Whitaker."

"Are . . . are you policemen?"

"We are. Come on, let's have it all. We've got a girl to identify you."

Whitaker's face crumbled. "I . . . I guess that's best, isn't it?"

"It's best," Andy said.

"I didn't mean to run him down. But the girl screamed, you know, and I thought he'd heard it. He stuck up his hand, and I . . . I got scared, I suppose, and there was no one around, so I . . . I knocked him . . . I knocked him down. Is he all right? I mean . . ."

"He's dead," I said.

"Dead?" Whitaker's eyes went wide. "Dead . . . "

"Was it you who smashed that picket fence?" Andy asked.

Whitaker was still dazed.

"Wh . . . what?" he said, very slowly and after a pause.

"The picket fence. On Barnes."

"Oh. Yes, yes. That was afterwards. I was still scared. I . . . I made a wrong turn, and I saw a police car, and I wanted to get away fast. I . . . I backed into the fence."

"Why'd you bother that little girl, Whitaker?"

He collapsed into a chair. "I don't know," he said. "I don't know."

"You're in a jam," Andy said. "You'd better come along with us."

"Yes, yes." He stood up, took his hat from a rack in the corner, and then started for the door. At the door, he stopped and said, "I'd better tell my mechanics. I'd better tell them I'll be gone for the day."

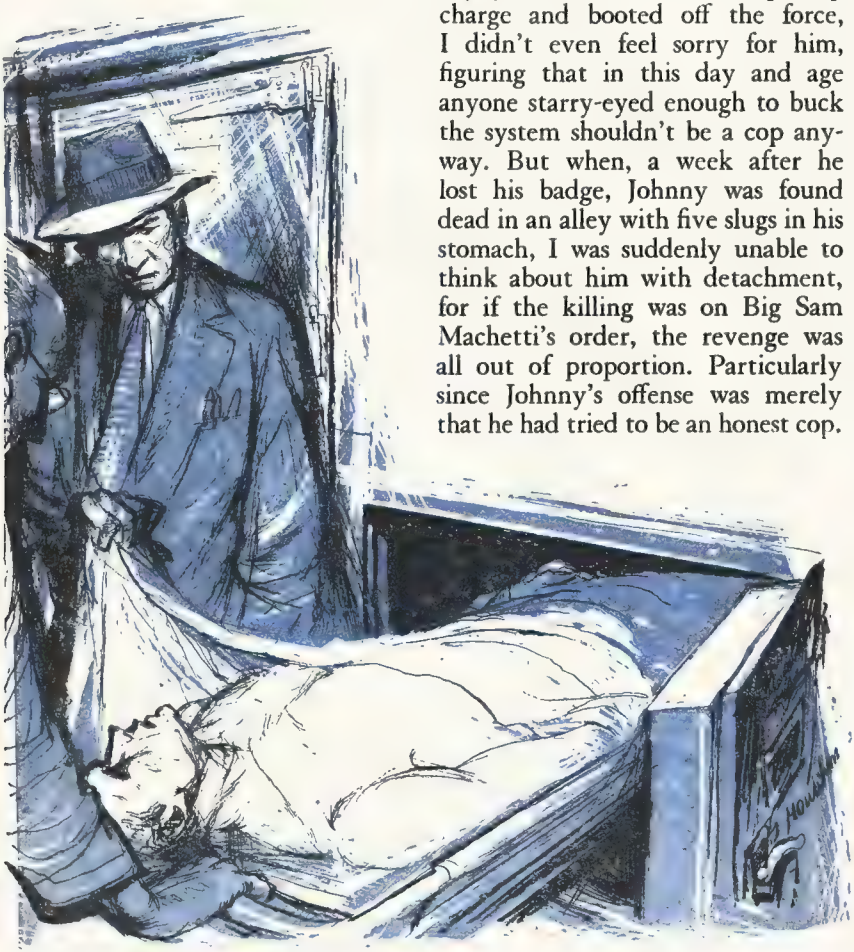
I looked at Whitaker, and I thought of Benson. My eyes met Andy's, and I put it into words for both of us.

"You'll be gone a lot longer than that, Whitaker."

Bonus Cop

Mike was in the middle — between the cops and the syndicates. Which meant he was getting shot at from both *sides.*

BY RICHARD DEMING



WHEN young Johnny Doud was boarded on a trumped-up charge and booted off the force, I didn't even feel sorry for him, figuring that in this day and age anyone starry-eyed enough to buck the system shouldn't be a cop anyway. But when, a week after he lost his badge, Johnny was found dead in an alley with five slugs in his stomach, I was suddenly unable to think about him with detachment, for if the killing was on Big Sam Machetti's order, the revenge was all out of proportion. Particularly since Johnny's offense was merely that he had tried to be an honest cop.

I doubt that even then I would have done anything about it if the dead man hadn't been Johnny Doud, for after twenty-four years as a crooked cop, it takes more than a sense of revolt against injustice to make you do an about-face and suddenly start a crusade against crime.

You heard right: I'm a crooked cop. On the syndicate's payroll, along with every other cop on our force above the rank of patrolman, for in this town you either ride with the syndicate or stay a patrolman. I don't offer that as an excuse. I'm neither apologizing nor bragging, but merely stating a fact: I, Captain Michael Train, chief of Homicide, accept one thousand dollars a month for doing nothing. That is, for doing nothing at the psychologically proper time. When the syndicate wants me to do nothing.

Twenty-four years ago when I was a twenty-year-old rookie, with my eyes wide open, I made the choice between staying a patrolman at $3,600 a year for the rest of my life, or eventually rising to a $6,500 captaincy, with nearly double that on the side. Whenever I begin to regret that decision, I drive my convertible over on the South Side and look at the frame tenement where I grew up in two rooms because my father was an honest cop, then drive home to the ten-room lake front house I built for Myra just before she left me for a racetrack owner who could spend millions on her instead of thousands. Even empty except for a houseboy, it looks better to me than the tenement.

Twenty years ago I had to make that trip regularly. Ten years ago not so often. I don't make it at all any more.

I nearly had to make it the day Johnny Doud reported in as a replacement on the Morality Squad for Detective Sergeant Burke, who was killed by a hopped-up house madam in an argument over payoff. But I managed to resist the impulse. Johnny reported directly to me, because at that time I was head of the Morality Squad instead of in my current job as chief of Homicide.

Johnny Doud upset me for two reasons, though the second reason didn't develop until several days after he reported in. The first reason hit me between the eyes the moment he saluted and announced his name, however. For I realized that finally, after all these years, I was face-to-face with Helen O'Brien's son — who by all rights should have been my son, too.

The same decision which moved me out of the tenement district twenty-four years ago lost me Helen O'Brien as a bride, for, in her own words, I lost her respect. She made a decision too, and her decision was to marry honest but plodding Eddie Doud and work herself to an early death in a two-room flat

identical to the ones in which we all three grew up. Except for that decision it would have been Helen instead of the glamorous Myra for whom I built my lake front home, and the boy standing before me now would bear the last name of Train instead of Doud.

These thoughts flooded over me in a rush while the newly appointed detective second grade respectfully waited for me to speak. A faint look of puzzlement on his face because of my continued silence brought me back to the present.

"Glad to have you, Johnny," I said, rising and shaking his hand. "If I looked startled, you'll have to excuse me. Your mother was one of my closest childhood friends."

"She was?" he asked, surprised. "I don't ever remember her mentioning your name."

He didn't mean the remark to be unkind, I'm sure, for he could hardly know what the thought of Helen and the sight of him was doing to me. I made some vague remark about this showing how passing years made you lose contact with old friends, and cut the interview short.

Even from this short contact, I got a sneaking suspicion that the boy wouldn't do on the Morality Squad. Not from anything he said, for aside from announcing his name and making that one comment about his mother never mentioning me, he hadn't said anything. I think I must have sensed his ingrained honesty from something in his eyes, or perhaps it was merely subconscious knowledge that any son of Helen's would have been raised that way.

Three days later, when Johnny and I had the usual heart-to-heart talk I always gave newcomers to the Morality Squad, I knew his assignment had been a mistake.

How the police board happened to boost him from beat level to a spot where he had to be taken into the system is still a mystery to me. A two-minute conversation with the kid could have told them the only safe place for his ideals was in the Traffic Division.

2.

As was my routine in working around to what I called my "indoctrination lecture," I caught Johnny just as he was going off duty at the end of his third day. This was the psychological moment for the approach, for up till then I had had him working the desk in order to learn procedure, but next morning he was scheduled for his first duty on the street.

Managing to hit the elevator when he did, I asked casually, "How you making out, Johnny?"

"Fine, Lieutenant Train," he said in a respectful voice. "I think I'm getting the hang of things."

"In a hurry to get home?"

He gave me a questioning look. "No, sir. Not particularly."

"Then I'll buy you a drink. We haven't had much chance to get acquainted yet."

He seemed pleased and a little awed that the head of the Morality Squad would make such a friendly gesture to a mere detective second grade. His embarrassment amused me at the moment, for I hadn't yet discovered the peculiar mixture of idealism and hard cynicism beneath it.

I took him to the *Nook*, which is expensive enough to be shunned by reporters without being so expensive he would feel out of place. I liked to avoid reporter hangouts for my indoctrination lectures.

When we were settled in a booth with bourbons and water before us, I asked, "Any questions about your duties when you go out on the street, Johnny?"

"I don't believe so, sir. I understand that to start I'm just to wander around certain hotel lobbies and bars looking for women who solicit."

I said, "Before we go any farther, Johnny, around headquarters I'm either Lieutanant Train or Sir. Off-duty I'm Mike. Okay?"

"All right, Mike," he said agreeably.

"Now I want to make sure you understand the function of the Morality Squad, Johnny. And not just its function, but what you might call its philosophy. Think you do?"

He looked slightly puzzled. "I believe so, sir. I mean Mike. Its function is to suppress vice."

I gave him an indulgent smile. "Not 'suppress', Johnny. 'Control' is the word. There's a distinction."

Johnny said, "I don't think I follow."

"The philosophy of the Morality Squad is based on the practical realization that prostitution can't possibly be eliminated in a city this size. You can close houses, but all that accomplishes is to drive prostitutes into streetwalking and to picking up customers in bars and hotel lobbies. We prefer to let the houses operate so we can watch them and make them conform to certain rules. No drunk-rolling or loud parties, for instance. When a house steps out of line, we raid it. As long as it conforms, we don't. See what I mean?"

He frowned at his drink. "In a way. But have you ever tried shutting them down completely?"

"Sure," I lied in an easy voice. "Ten years ago we closed them up for three months. The venereal rate doubled."

When he had absorbed this along with part of his drink, he said, "Then the squad concentrates mostly on arresting women who solicit in public places?"

"Mostly. But we believe in control there too, rather than stopping the racket completely. When you start out tomorrow, I'll give you a list of names. When you spot a hustler, ask her name and check it

against your list. If she's not on it, she's either a free-lance or operating outside her authorized territory, and should be pulled in. If she is on it, let her alone."

Slowly he asked, "You mean the Morality Squad actually licenses certain pros?"

"Not licenses, Johnny. We just keep a list of those who behave." Then, because it had to be done sometime, I gave it to him bluntly. "The girls on the list and the madams of the houses like to show their appreciation once a month. Starting this payday you'll find an extra envelope in your desk every thirty days."

I expected a little shock to show on his face, for the new ones frequently struggle with their consciences before accepting the inevitable. But the look he gave me was merely one of contemptuous amusement.

"The payoff, eh, Lieutenant? I'll admit I'm surprised the offer came so soon, but I'm not surprised it came. I'm fairly green as a cop, but I was raised in this town and I know it bottom side up. I know it's a syndicate town and I know the level of vice, dope traffic and wide-open gambling it maintains couldn't exist without crooked cops. But rule me out. You happened to pick an honest cop."

I said, "You just think you are, Johnny. I'll give it to you straight. Cops who buck the system don't stay cops. Do you think I'd lay it on the line as rawly as I have if I thought you had the chance of a snowball in hell of making me any trouble? Report to the commissioner that I offered you a bribe, and you'd be bounced off the force as incompetent. This town is run from top to bottom. You're either in, or out of a job. Take your pick."

He shook his head with the same contemptuous amusement. "There's a third alternative, Lieutenant. Innocent bystander. I like being a cop too much to buck the system, Lieutenant. You can count on me following your list. But don't leave any bonuses in my desk drawer unless you want them handed back in front of some reporter with a loud question as to what they're for. I won't waste my time running in hustlers the desk will refuse to book, but my cooperation is free. It's based on my knowledge that you can't fight City Hall, not on my desire for the green stuff that gets you out of the filthy part of town."

He rose, said, "Thanks for the drink, Lieutenant, sir," and walked out.

3.

Though I saw Johnny every day after that, we never again exchanged anything but formal words. He did his job, he was quiet and respectful around headquarters, and the crusading spirit I uneasily suspected was boiling within him failed to

come to the surface. That is, until the night he pulled his spectacular practical joke.

I knew all along, of course, that eventually he would cause trouble. The only excuse I can give for not reporting him to the commissioner as a misfit immediately after our conference was that he was Helen's son. That and the odd fact that he reminded me of myself at twenty-two.

Not that he resembled me physically in the least, for he was slim and wiry and narrow-faced, and not by the wildest stretch of imagination could my six-foot-three frame be classified as wiry. The resemblance was purely psychological, and it hurt. He was the same combination of cynicism and idealism I had been at twenty-two. Except that his idealism outweighed his cynicism, whereas my balance had been slightly the other way, his approach to life struck me as identical to what mine had once been. Seeing him every day almost started me again driving south to see the old tenement. Possibly, if I'd given in to that impulse, I would have come back to earth enough to have him transferred back into harness, which would have been better for everybody concerned, including Johnny. But I resisted it and the situation dragged on.

It was a Monday night about a month after our conference that he pulled his stunt. It was his first trick of night duty, as a matter of fact; before that he had been pulling days. The fact that he pulled it at night when none of the division heads were around headquarters helped him get away with it. It also helped that a new desk man was on, one who didn't know Johnny and didn't know Patricia Rogers.

I have to explain at this point that Pat Rogers was Big Sam Machetti's kept woman, and the local racket boss was nuts about the girl. Since Big Sam was in his late forties and ugly as a toad, he didn't have much control over the beautiful twenty-year-old blonde, however, in spite of the big dough he spent on her. All the boys knew she played around and that Sam knew it and took it.

The idea must have popped into Johnny Doud's head and appealed to his sense of humor when he accidentally bumped into her in a bar while making his usual round. He knew who she was, I'm sure, but all she knew about Johnny was that he was a strange and attractive young man. She made the same play for him she had made for dozens of strange young men in the past, Johnny led her on until she made a definite proposition, asked her name, made a poker-faced check of it against the list in his pocket, and then arrested her.

Technically it was a legitimate arrest, for while there was no mention of money involved in Pat's suggestion, by some oversight our

state legislature listed prostitution as "soliciting the custom of any persons or persons for immoral purposes," and neglected to add the words, "for financial consideration."

When he dragged her into headquarters screeching profanity and demanding that Sam Machetti be phoned immediately, the desk man paid no more attention than he had to the screeches of the two previous free-lancers Johnny had booked that night. He merely checked his own list, found no Patricia Rogers recorded on it, and locked her up for the night.

It wasn't until Pat was herded into Police Court with the usual collection of drunks and prostitutes next morning, where the judge recognized her and turned pale, that all hell began to break loose. On the judge's order she was whisked to headquarters, Sam Machetti was informed, and for the next forty-five minutes the air around headquarters was blue.

Johnny, by now realizing that his practical joke had ended his police career, let loose and decided to create as much confusion as possible in a final gesture of defiance. When Sam Machetti stormed in, accompanied by two bodyguards and a lawyer, Johnny herded the bodyguards into a cell at the point of a gun (apparently merely to get them out of the way, as he never charged them with anything), pushed Big Sam against the wall, searched him, found a thirty-eight automatic beneath his arm and booked him for carrying a concealed weapon. Since several reporters were looking on, the desk man had no choice but to enter the charge.

Big Sam Machetti, whose public-relations weakness was that he could never keep his mouth shut in front of reporters, was the star of the show. He said, "No punk cop can push me around. I could buy and sell every cop in this town. I got more money than Rockefeller. You wanta see a cop busted to nothing? Just watch and see what happens to this slob."

Sam carried out his threat. Pat Rogers' case was dropped from the docket, but when the weapons charge against Sam came up, the judge solemnly declared the evidence inadmissible because Sam had been searched without a warrant. Shortly afterward Johnny was boarded and bounced from the force for "violating a citizen's constitutional rights."

This, to my mind, was no more than he could reasonably expect, if he was crazy enough to make a laughing stock out of the syndicate's local top man. I didn't even feel sorry for him, though I confess I felt it took plenty of guts to do what he did. A dim recollection of my own impulses at the age of twenty-two gave me some faint insight into what led him to sacrifice his whole career for the sake of

putting a hood like Big Sam on the spot.

There was nothing I could do, or wanted to do about the situation, however, until the night Johnny was brought into the morgue with five slugs in his stomach. I had been a captain and chief of Homicide less than a week at the time, and spent a good deal of evening time at headquarters getting acquainted with my new job. That's how I happened to be around when he arrived shortly after midnight.

The minute I looked at the body and felt the dull rage rising within me, I knew I was in danger of flying off the handle. Suspecting I might lose my head and do something silly, I drove out past the old tenement for the first time in years, gave it a good look and then drove out to the lake to take an equally good look at my house.

It worked until I got back to the morgue and took another gander at Johnny. Then I let the rage take hold of me, and despite its now being nearly two o'clock in the morning, ordered Big Sam Machetti routed out of bed and brought down to the morgue.

4.

As far as investigating went, there was no particular point in making Big Sam view the body at all, let alone at two in the morning, for I knew who the dead man was, I knew Big Sam knew who he was, and I knew putting the racket boss to the inconvenience of looking at the man he had probably ordered killed would accomplish nothing, only irritate him a little.

I think that was why I did it. It was exactly the sort of thing Johnny would have done in similar circumstances, and in my dull rage I felt I owed it to Johnny.

When Machetti had completed his sullen viewing of the corpse, I led him back out to the anteroom of the morgue. He looked me over with a mixture of irritation and caution.

Finally he asked, "You know whose unofficial recommendation got you moved from head of the Morality Squad to chief of Homicide, so you'd be in line for promotion to captain, Mike?"

"I didn't know," I said. "But I'm not surprised."

"Well, now you know," he said curtly, but still with a note of caution. "What's the gag? Ain't you taking your new job a little too seriously?"

"I just wanted you to see what a swell job your boy did," I told him. "Five slugs grouped in a six-inch circle. I thought maybe you'd want to issue an award for marksmanship."

His nostrils flared and he moved his two hundred pounds of fat and muscle a step toward me. I wasn't very impressed, since I weigh two-forty and Nature left out the fat.

He said, "What the hell are you trying to pull, Captain?" I didn't change my tone, but I changed my expression a little. "Softly, Sam. And get that Edward G. Robinson look off your face or I'll spread you over the walls like jam."

He looked startled, and after studying my expression a moment, he took a step backward. "What the devil's eating you, Mike?"

"Johnny Doud," I said. "He was a rookie under me when I headed the Morality Squad. He was a lousy cop. For this town anyway. Maybe he'd have been a good one on an honest force, because he was honest. Which is why he stopped being a cop."

Sam continued to regard me with caution, but now a touch of puzzlement mixed with the caution. "You never went overboard about honest guys getting killed before, Mike. What gives with this kid?"

I didn't tell him the boy lying inside might have been my own son if I had made a different decision twenty-four years ago, because that was something Sam Machetti would have been incapable of understanding, and something I wouldn't have told him even if he were capable. I also didn't tell him that the sight of Johnny's dead body suddenly made me realize how empty my beautiful ten-room house was, and had started me to comparing it unfavorably to a tenement flat containing a woman named Helen and a son named Johnny.

Instead I said, "I always liked Johnny Doud; he reminded me of myself at his age. Except for one thing. When the big decision had to be made, Johnny made the opposite one I did."

He started to sneer, but after examining my face he changed it to a strained grin. "So he gets a marble slab and you got a home on the lake front. What you so excited about? We been friends a long time, Mike, but even friends I don't like to push me too much."

"I wouldn't push you, Sam. I know my place. I remember you once bragged to reporters you could buy and sell every cop in town. I'm one of the cops you bought."

He looked at me, uneasily.

I said bluntly, "Sam, as I understand our arrangement, I get paid off to cover syndicate killings. Routine homicides that don't concern the syndicate I'm expected to solve as fast and efficiently as possible in order to make the record look good to the public. Right?"

"Now wait a minute, Mike. You crazy? We never discuss nothing like this right out."

"That agreement's implied, isn't it?" I asked. "You're not handing me a thousand a month over my salary to fix parking tickets. Isn't it true I have the go-ahead on any homicide not connected with the syndicate?"

"If you say so, Mike."

"What's the status on Johnny Doud?"

". . . uh . . . I don't think the syndicate would care whether you solved this one or not."

I gave him a cold grin. "Mind if I check that with the boss man in New York City?"

Machetti's eyes narrowed. "What you mean by that crack?"

"I mean this one wasn't syndicate business, Sam. I think Johnny Doud was gunned for personal reasons. And you know how touchy the boss man is about unnecessary murders. So touchy he's even been known to point his finger at syndicate employees who settle personal grudges with guns. If any syndicate men are mixed up in Johnny's murder, it's too damned bad. They ought to know better than to murder without syndicate permission. Unless the man in New York gives me a long-distance call, I'll assume the syndicate has no interest in Johnny Doud. If it has, you better pass him the word to make the call, because if the phone doesn't ring by tomorrow morning, I start a no-holds-barred investigation."

A drop or two of sweat appeared on Sam Machetti's forehead. I knew it wasn't my threatening investigation which put it there, but mention of the man in New York, for while Sam usually treated me with caution when we were alone, he had too many guns behind him to be afraid of a cop on his payroll. So, I knew I had guessed right and could safely go after Johnny's murderer without biting the hand that fed me.

With elaborate disinterest Sam said, "I didn't say the syndicate was interested in Johnny Doud, Mike. I just said it didn't care one way or the other. Neither do I personally. I was at a ringside table at the *Cheshire Cat* about the time you tell me Doud got it."

I was still wearing my cold grin. "Then you won't care what I do to the killer, Sam. Like putting five slugs in his guts."

5.

Some cops on the syndicate's payroll, probably because they still feel that they are honest even after taking graft, are never quite at ease with their underworld associates. Racketeers, quick to notice and take advantage of the semi-apologetic attitude such cops develop, treat them with arrogant contempt for the pleasure of seeing them cringe.

Other cops react as I do. To me it's a business arrangement, and what I deliver more than balances my payoffs. On top of having to live with myself, I'm not inclined to take any guff from upper-level morons, even when they own dozens of safe deposit vaults and drive around in Cadillacs. I've never made any bones about how I feel about it, and because I have a notoriously short fuse, most hoods, including Machetti, treat me with cautious reserve.

This is merely a matter of per-

sonal relations, however. While I wouldn't hesitate to slap even Sam Machetti silly for giving me a cross word, I carry out syndicate orders to the letter. I haven't any choice. *Nobody*, once on the bandwagon, bucks them and lives.

So, while Johnny Doud's death had my fuse burning even shorter than usual, I wasn't angry enough to commit suicide. I waited till morning before a making a move, but when no call came from New York City, I knew the killing hadn't been a syndicate affair.

Although I have sixteen men on my staff, and three were cooling their heels on standby, I personally took over the case.

My first stop was the scene of the crime. The body had been found lying in an alley alongside a respectable neighborhood tavern over on the West Side. There was a parking lot behind the tavern for the use of customers, and the theory was that Johnny had parked his car on the lot, started up the alley to enter the tavern, and been met by the killer halfway between the lot and the street. Johnny's car had been found on the lot.

The place was called *Baer's Cafe*, and it was no different from a million similar taverns. Just a bar, a few tables, a juke box and a pair of rest rooms. Two men were playing draw pinochle at a table and no one at all sat at the bar, about normal business for a neighborhood tavern at ten in the morning.

The proprietor was a skinny old man with a lecherous look, and his name was Norman Wishbrock. Baer, he explained to me, had been dead ten years; Wishbrock had bought the business from the widow but never gotten around to changing the place's name.

"I don't know much about it, Captain," he said. "One of the customers found him back there about midnight when he started after his car. The customer comes back in and tells me, I go out to look, and then I call the cops."

"Who was the customer?"

"Ollie Williams. He's always around here. Fact, he was here just a minute ago."

A girl in a blue waitress' uniform came from the kitchen. Wishbrock asked, "You see Ollie go out, Marie?"

"He's back in the john," Marie said, and eyed me appraisingly.

She was a plump brunette in her late twenties, built like a brick outhouse. The pinochle players at that moment called for more beer, and she turned toward them, glanced back over her shoulder to make sure I was watching her, and walked over to collect their glasses with her hips exaggeratedly undulating.

The old man behind the bar watched this performance with wistful lechery. "She's going to throw that thing out of joint some day," he said. "Swishes it at every man who walks in. But lay your hand

on her and she'll pop you in the eye. Women are all crazy."

A chunky bald-headed man of middle age came from the men's room. "Here's Ollie now," the proprietor said.

I showed Ollie Williams my badge and had him repeat his story, but he could add nothing I didn't already know. No one in the tavern had noticed the shots, an oddity old Norman Wishbrock explained by dropping a nickel in the record player, reaching behind the machine and adjusting the volume to a headache-inducing blare.

"We had a couple hepcats in here last night," he said after reducing the volume again to the point where he could be heard. "They kept turning it up and I kept turning it down. Finally I disconnected the damned thing. I figure this guy must of been shot one of the times they had the volume up."

It occurred to me the hepcats might have been planted by the killer for the deliberate purpose of drowning out shots. I asked the proprietor if he knew them, but he said they had never been in before.

"A boy and a girl," he said. "Just a couple of kids." Then he added hurriedly, "But both over eighteen."

"Did you know the dead man?" I asked. "Johnny Doud?"

"He'd been in a couple of times. I never knew his name."

"I knew it was Johnny," Marie offered. "I heard the blonde call him that."

"What blonde?"

Bald-headed Ollie Williams smacked his lips. "Wouldn't the guys around here like to know, now her boy friend is dead. What a dish!"

"If you like them cheap and obvious," Marie said coldly.

"You know who the blonde was?" I asked her.

She shook her head, then creased her brow and said, "Wait a minute. I think I remember him calling her Pat once."

With a touch of astonishment I wondered if the girl could have been Pat Rogers. After the way she had carried on when he arrested her on a soliciting charge, it hardly seemed likely she would later be going around with Johnny. But you could never tell about Pat. She wasn't used to being refused by the men she passed at, and possibly Johnny was a challenge she couldn't resist.

When Wishbrock, Ollie Williams and Marie collaborated on a description of the Pat who had been with Johnny, I was sure she was Patricia Rogers.

I asked Marie if she had ever overheard anything the two said to each other.

Again she shook her head. "From watching them I'd guess it was mostly love stuff though. At least on her part. She was really giving

him the treatment. But this Johnny wasn't fooled. You could tell by the way he looked at her, kind of mocking, he was going along for the good time, but wasn't taking her too serious. I guess he knew her for the kind that would go after anything in pants."

"Now, Marie," Wishbrock admonished her. "She seemed like a nice girl to me."

Marie looked at him contemptuously. "That's because you like them sexy, old man, but it's all in your mind."

When I left, the waitress accompanied me to the door, moving her hips in her usual suggestive manner. Just to test the old man's theory, I put my arm around her waist and gave her a squeeze. It didn't get me a pop in the eye. All it got me was a giggle.

I guessed that probably it was only old men she resented touching her.

6.

Patricia Rogers lived at the Dayton in a seven-room suite. She came to the door wearing a red silk jacket which veed from the throat nearly to her navel, and probably would have dipped even farther if it had not been a slip-over affair which wouldn't open any deeper unless you tore the material. The bottom of it hung only halfway down her thighs, exposing nearly all of her perfectly formed legs. I don't know what you'd call it, because I never saw anything like it before or since, but it was loose-fitting, all in one piece, and had no buttons. As nearly as I could judge, she wore nothing else, not even shoes. The nails of her small feet were bright crimson.

"Why, Lieutenant Train!" she said. "What a nice surprise."

"It's Captain Train now," I told her. "Busy?"

"Just painting my toenails, and I've finished. Come in."

She stepped aside, but only far enough so that I had to squeeze by. She was not a tall girl, no more than five-three, which gave me an even foot height advantage. I glanced down as I passed, and from that vantage point she might as well have been naked, for the jacket was so loose fitting I could see most of the way down. As I had suspected, there was nothing under it.

I took a seat on one end of a settee which probably cost as much as all the furnishings in my front room. Pat sat on her feet next to me, her knees pointing in my direction and the short jacket carelessly draped to expose the full length of her thigh and half of a rounded buttock. She was strictly an indoor girl, for there wasn't a spot of tan on her anywhere. She was milk white from the tip of her beautiful little nose to the tips of her delicately shaped toes.

"I've been wondering when you'd

get around to calling on me, Captain," she said. "Wondering for months. Drink?" She made no move to go mix one.

I shook my head and wrenched my eyes from her thigh. They landed on the V at her throat, which was no better for my emotions, for the jacket barely covered the tips of her breasts.

"This is a business call," I said. "Why the hell don't you go put some more clothes on, so I can remember what I came to say?"

"Can't you remember?" she laughed, and deliberately leaned forward.

I forced my mind back to the reason for the visit and said, "I remember now. About Johnny Doud."

Her eyes were deep blue when she turned them to me, and for a change there was compassion in them instead of merely passion.

"I heard about Johnny," she said in a low voice. "I'm sorry."

"Why?" I asked. "I thought you didn't like him."

"You mean because of that trick he played? I was sore at the time, but I got over it after I got to know him better."

I said, "Just how much better did you get to know him?"

"Why, Captain!" she said "What kind of a question is that?"

"Let's not spar, Pat. I know you've been going out with Johnny on the sly. You were with him at least twice at *Baer's Cafe*, the same place where he got killed."

"Who says?" she asked.

"I say. Don't bother arguing, because I *know*. Tell me about it."

For a moment she examined me, a slight frown puckering her smooth brow. Then she seemed to come to a decision.

"I was seeing him some," she admitted. "You won't tell Sam, will you?"

I shook my head. "Not unless the fact has some bearing on the murder."

"How could it have bearing on the murder?'

"I don't know, If it hasn't, you've nothing to worry about. Go ahead."

"Well," she said reluctantly, "I was seeing him a little even before he was boarded. The charge Johnny booked me on was dropped, you know, and that day he called me up to tell me. He said he had withdrawn it himself and he was sorry to have caused me trouble. He explained he hadn't had anything against me personally, but just used me to get in Sam's hair. By then I was calmed down, and he made such a nice apology, I invited him over for a drink."

When she stopped, I said, "Then?"

"That's all there is to it. We went out a few times."

I took a wild guess. "You were with him last night when he got shot," I said flatly.

Fright jumped into her eyes. "That isn't true," she whispered.

"I have a witness who saw you

get out of the car in the parking lot with him."

Her lower lip began to tremble. "Maybe it was another girl."

"No, ma'am," I said definitely. "It was you." Setting down my drink, I leaned over and and got hold of her hand. "Don't look so scared, Pat. I told you, unless it has some bearing on the murder, I won't tell Sam you were cheating on him again. All I'm after is the killer. Who was it?"

She hugged her knees as though she were cold.

"I don't know," she said in a low voice. "It happened so fast and the alley was dark. This shape just suddenly appeared and the gun flashed and kept flashing, even after Johnny fell. It didn't sound loud because a record player was rattling the walls inside the tavern. Then the man was gone. I never got a look at his face. I knelt beside Johnny and saw he was dead, and I got panicky because I didn't want Sam to find out I'd been out with somebody else. I ran back through the parking lot to the next street, walked three blocks and caught a cab home."

"You sure Sam didn't know you were seeing Johnny?" I asked.

Her eyes gradually widened. "Oh no, Mike. Sam wouldn't . . . I mean I'm sure the killer wasn't Sam."

"He doesn't do his own killing," I said. "He just nods to one of his boys, then goes somewhere to fix an alibi. He had a beauty for last night."

The thing was now beginning to make sense. I couldn't see Sam Machetti ordering Johnny killed in final vengeance for the practical joke when he had already punished Johnny for it. I also couldn't quite see him bumping off rival suitors for Pat's attentions, since this would involve eliminating half the men in town. But it was just possible that because he already hated Johnny Doud's guts, the discovery that Johnny was playing with Pat had been enough to make him lose his head and order the boy killed. The fact that the murder occurred while Johnny was with Pat, and at a place neither frequented without the other, tended to bear out this possibility.

Pat broke into my thoughts by asking, "Suppose this was a syndicate kill? Maybe they wouldn't want you messing with it."

I stared at her.

"What do you know about the syndicate?"

"I'm related to it by marriage. My sister's married to the king pin."

"The boss man?" I asked.

"That's right," she said. "He doesn't approve of me much, but he's still my brother-in-law. For that matter, my sister doesn't approve of me either."

"Don't worry about it," I said, rising and patting her on the head. "I approve of you fine."

7.

Now that I was reasonably satisfied Big Sam Machetti had ordered Johnny's killing, my next move was to locate the hired gun. The only way to do that involved tipping my hand to the whole local underworld, which in turn meant to Sam himself, for every bit of grapevine gossip eventually trickled up to him. My best chance was to move fast and keep moving until I found my boy, hoping Sam wouldn't get the word until I had already made the nab.

I wasn't particularly afraid Big Sam would try to fight me by bringing his influence to bear . . . by buzzing the commissioner and having me suddenly suspended, for instance . . . for if he *had* ordered Johnny's killing, he wouldn't want word to seep to syndicate headquarters that he was covering for a killing they didn't know about. I also wasn't very concerned about any physical action he might start, for he couldn't afford simply to drop the word to the grapevine that I was fingered, as he would for a routine syndicate kill. That would start every gun in town hunting me in hopes of earning the bonus, but it would show his hand as certainly as employing influence. If he sent guns after me, he would pick no more than one or two he could trust to keep quiet, and I knew I could handle that amount of opposition.

However, I did fear that if word reached him before I reached the hired killer of Johnny Doud, Machetti would order the gunman out of town and I never would locate him. For that reason speed was important.

Right after lunch I started by contacting a dozen stoolies who had been useful in the past. Not only did I draw a dozen blanks, but I felt sure none was covering up, for to a man the general reaction was puzzlement, and not a one showed a giveaway trace of uneasiness.

The fact that not a single pigeon had heard so much as a whisper concerning Johnny's death convinced me it was useless to work up gradually. Normally I would next have made the rounds of bookshops, numbers parlors and houses, where willingness to talk was next easiest to induce, then have moved on to district supervisors, where resistance to questioning would begin to get tough, and finally up into the Cadillac set, where getting answers would be a real problem.

I couldn't afford the time necessary for such a gradual approach. Bypassing everything in between, I went from the stoolies straight to the man closest to Big Sam Machetti, his payoff man, George Vandassa.

I found George Vandassa alone at home in his apartment over on West Fourth. He was a man nearly as big as I, thicker through the stomach and less thick through the shoulders, with a receding brow and sharp little eyes whose birdlike ap-

pearance seemed out of place in such a square and heavy face.

He let me in with the same kind of caution most hoods show me, then simply waited for me to speak my piece without issuing an invitation to sit.

"I'll make it brief, George," I said. "I want to know who gunned Johnny Doud, and I want to know fast."

He gave me a puzzled look. "You came to the wrong source then, Mike. All I know about it is what I saw in the papers."

In a reasonable tone I said, "Five slugs placed in a six-inch circle sounds like a professional job, George. There's never a professional kill in this town without at least a hint reaching the grapevine, but there isn't the beginning of a rumor on this one. To me that means it was arranged very quietly, and right from the top. Probably only the guy who ordered the killing and the professional gun who did it know who pulled the trigger. Unless the guy who ordered it was Sam Machetti. Then you know about it too, because you know everything about Sam."

Now his puzzlement turned to faint astonishment. "If it was Sam, you think I'd tell you?"

I said, "All I want is the name of the gun, George. Make it easy on yourself and tell me, or I'll have to work it out of you."

His birdlike eyes grew even smaller. "That's a large order, copper. I'm not a lineup punk you can push around, but you can try your luck if you're crazy to see a hospital."

So I tried my luck. A few preliminaries were necessary before I could really get down to work, such as knocking a gun out of his hand and a moment later bending his wrist until he dropped a knife, but he was actually less of a problem than I had anticipated. The fat bulging over his belt gave a satisfactory quiver the first time I sank a fist into it, and when I sank a second fist in the same place, he threw up all over his expensive carpet.

I think he was muscle-bound, for his attempts at retaliation were so slow I didn't even bother to block them. I merely stepped inside and hammered his body until he staggered around like a drunk, finally backed against the wall and pleaded with me to stop.

"I'll wait for a moment," I told him. "Then I go to work on your face . . . unless you want to answer my question."

Both hands raised, palm out, in front of him. "No, Mike! For God's sake, no. I don't know a thing about it."

"Too bad," I said, and belted him in the jaw.

Five minutes later I had to stop; I couldn't bring myself to hit him any more. With lumps on his face the size of lemons, his nose swollen to twice normal size, both eyes closed and blood running from his mouth,

he crouched tremblingly on his knees, his hands clutched to his face. He was no longer making even a token attempt to defend himself.

"Still no name?" I asked wearily.

Blindly he shook his head.

"Then I pass. You should be able to pry a bonus from Sam for holding out under this one. Want me to send you a doctor?"

He shook his head again.

He was still on his knees and still trembling when I pulled the front door shut behind me.

8.

On the way back to Homicide I decided the hell with the whole thing. Analyzing my motives for involving myself in such a touchy investigation as far as I had, I came to the conclusion I was behaving in the same stupidly idealistic way Johnny Doud had, and was likely to bring myself just as much trouble. At the very least I was now on the black list of the two most powerful racketeers in town, and while I was too valuable to the syndicate to fear either one would let his personal feelings start something for him as long as I continued to abide by syndicate orders, I knew that at the first convenient opportunity either or both would tie a can to my tail.

Beside that, George Vandassa undoubtedly would lose no time in telling Big Sam what I was after, which meant that within a matter of hours the gunnie who had killed Johnny would be out of sight for good. Even if my common sense had not told me to drop the investigation, I realized I was at a dead end.

Back at headquarters I added to the case record the negative knowledge I had gotten that day, plus the small amount of positive knowledge I had picked up en route, and filed the folder in the open file. So far as I was concerned at the moment, it could stay there until somebody came in and confessed.

Next morning, early, Sam Machetti dropped in to see me. He left his two bodyguards in the hall outside my office, studied me without smiling through the open door for a moment, then moved his fat body into the room.

I said, "Morning, Sam," waited until he had lowered his two hundred pounds into a chair and offered him a cigarette. He shook his head, his toadlike eyes still studying me. I lit a butt for myself and waited.

"I don't think I like what you did to my friend, George," he said finally.

"I don't like what was done to my friend, Johnny Doud."

His eyes narrowed. "That's another thing I came to see you about. The order's to lay off."

I raised my eyebrows. "Aren't you sticking your neck out, Sam?"

Slowly he shook his head. "You ought to know me well enough to know I wouldn't use the syndicate's name for personal reasons, Mike. The order to lay off is official."

For a moment I stared at him. "Isn't that a kind of abrupt switch? Yesterday morning you said the syndicate didn't care one way or the other."

"Yesterday morning I hadn't received a phone call from the old man."

"You got a call from the old man? From Mr. Big himself?"

He nodded. "Not more than an hour ago."

"Hell," I said. "What the devil's going on? Since when did New York start pulling their own out-of-town kills without even letting the locals know what's going on?"

Sam's fat shoulders lifted in a ponderous shrug. "I didn't ask any reasons. I'm just delivering the message. You want to bother him by calling him up and maybe making him think you ain't very bright, you ask the questions."

"It's not important," I said. "I stopped working on the case before you came in. It's in the open file already."

"Then we got nothing to worry about." Heavily he rose from his chair and stared down at me. "One other thing, Captain. Don't ever again lay a hand on a boy of mine unless he passes at you first. Anybody takes a crack at you, he's on his own, but make sure the crack comes first. You want to argue about it?"

"No," I said wearily. "I don't want to argue about anything."

After he left I sat thinking about the new and strange development for a long time. It just didn't make sense that New York was concerned about the killing of an obscure ex-cop who had never even visited there so far as I knew. Had Sam Machetti been lying about the call from New York? A moment's consideration convinced me he would never take such a chance, for there was always the possibility I would be pigheaded enough to double-check. There was a chance, however, that, frightened that I was getting close, Sam himself had phoned New York instead of receiving a call, convinced the big boss that Johnny's murder had been necessary to the syndicate's welfare, and gotten the order to leave it alone.

After a few more moment's consideration I discarded that theory as well, for its risk to Sam was almost as great as unauthorizedly using the syndicate's power. If Sam Machetti had order Johnny killed, his safest course was simply to sit tight.

Reluctantly I came to the conclusion that Sam was innocent of Johnny's death.

The only other possible solution seeped into my mind so slowly, I was hardly aware of it before I had the complete answer. All at once I knew exactly why Johnny had been killed and who had killed him.

I didn't do anything about it at the moment. As a matter of fact I probably never would have done anything about it if it hadn't been for the visit I received that night, for I had begun to realize I had been behaving as though I felt myself a

spiritual reincarnation of Johnny Doud, and unless I got my feet back on the ground fast, I was likely to end up on a marble slab next to him. It was one thing to go after Johnny's killer when I was convinced it had been merely a personal grudge kill, but quite another to go against the explicit orders of the syndicate. Up until that evening I had decided Johnny Doud was a dead issue.

Dinner was over, my houseboy, Nick, had left for the evening and I was sitting on the front porch looking out over the lake when Eddie Doud timidly turned in my gate. It was a shock to discover Eddie was still alive, for subconsciously but without any real reason, I believe I had thought of him as dead merely because Helen was dead. There was no reason he should have been, for he was only my age, and I haven't even begun to turn gray. But the certainty that there was no longer such a person as Eddie Doud was so deeply implanted in my unconscious, I had never even inquired about him to Johnny the day I told him I knew his mother.

Eddie was stooped and lined and gray, and looked sixty-five instead of the forty-four he was. Nevertheless I recognized him immediately, and my first reaction was depression, for it occurred to me that, had Helen lived, she would be as old and broken as he.

"Hello, Eddie," I managed in a quiet voice. "This is something of a surprise."

In a timid sort of way he seemed pleased that I recognized him. I asked him to sit in one of the canvas porch chairs, inquired what he would like to drink, and when he said beer, went to get bottles for both of us.

When we were both comfortably settled, he said in an apologetic voice, "I didn't want to bother you at your office, Mike. But this is really a business call rather than a social call. It's about Johnny."

"You know something we don't know, Eddie?"

"Just something he said, Mike. A day or two after he got kicked off the force. He said he didn't think Sam Machetti would be satisfied to have ruined his career, and if he ever got killed, I could bet that Big Sam was behind the killing."

"We've checked Big Sam," I told him. "He's clean."

"Well," he said in the same apologetic tone. "I thought you ought to know what Johnny said."

I thanked him for his help and we had a few more minutes of ordinary conversation before he rose, self-consciously thanked me for the beer and departed.

It was nothing Eddie Doud said which started the rage burning within me again. It was merely the sight of him. The premature agedness and the beaten look of the man. Eddie was a by-product of the system.

I don't mean his life had been directly affected by the syndicate, as was his son's or mine, for Eddie had

never even been offered the choice we were. He was merely a factory worker, a nobody of the slums, who had never been offered a choice of anything. But the slums in themselves were a part of the system, a part which might never have developed if it weren't for the misuse of power by the vast underworld government from which I took my orders.

And it wasn't even sympathy for Eddie which finally spurred me into action, for cynicism is too deeply ingrained in me for the evils of the system to arouse my ire. It was the thought of Helen 's life being wasted because she had been caught in the same trap, the thought that she had died for the same reason her son had died: simply because she was honest.

Going inside, I walked through the house from room to room, counting my material possessions. The furnishings alone, I estimated, had cost three times a patrolman's annual salary. Then I returned to the front porch, stared out over the lake and summoned up a vision of the old tenement. But wavering in front of it there kept appearing the thin face of Johnny Doud and the half-remembered face of his mother.

Quietly, I went to my room and strapped on my Detective Special.

9.

A Cadillac sedan containing two men was parked in front of the Dayton. I pulled up behind it, got out and sauntered over to peer through the front window. By the glow of a nearby street light I recognized them as Vic Casale and Tony Sark, Big Sam Machetti's bodyguards. Both were slim, loudly dressed, with flashy suits, and with the personalities and reactions of vicious animals.

Tony Sark, behind the wheel, said tonelessly, "Evening, Captain."

"Sam inside?" I asked.

Tony nodded. "But I don't think he'd like to be disturbed."

"This won't wait," I told him, and turned away.

I was conscious of the eyes of both men broodingly fixed on my back as I went up the apartment house's front walk.

Nearly a minute passed after I rang the bell before Pat Rogers came to the door. She was wearing a white terry-cloth housecoat which covered her completely from the throat to the ankles, her hair was mussed and her lipstick smeared.

Her eyes widened in alarm when she saw me. "For God's sake, Mike," she whispered. "Sam is here."

"I know it," I said. "This isn't a social call."

I brushed by her into the apartment just in time to meet Sam Machetti emerging from the bedroom. Sam wore slippers and a dressing robe, and below the hem of the robe his bare legs were fat and hairy.

"What in hell are you doing here?" he asked.

"Official business," I said. "I came to get the killer of Johnny Doud."

His thick lips pressed together and a nerve began jumping in his cheek. "I'm getting a little tired of you, Captain. You got your orders to lay off, and not only that, you're barking up the wrong tree. I never bumped that punk."

"I didn't mean to imply you did, Sam." I turned to look at Pat, who had moved from the door over into the center of the room. "It's your girl friend I'm after."

Sam looked from me to Pat and back at me again with his mouth open. "You nuts, copper?"

"Never been saner," I assured him. "It has to be Pat, because the big boss wouldn't cover for anyone else. If you or any other syndicate employee pulled a personal kill, the old man would throw you to the dogs. But Pat here is his sister-in-law. He doesn't approve of her, but he must figure blood is thicker than water, because he issued an order which directly reverses his usual policy. Pat got scared after the conversation I had with her yesterday, when I got her to admit she was with Johnny at the time he died, so she phoned her brother-in-law, or maybe her sister, and arranged for the order to lay off."

Sam stared at his girl friend. "You was with this Doud punk when he got it?"

"She was not only with him," I said. "She sent five shells from an automatic into his belly. What was the reason, baby? Delayed revenge for arresting you as a prostitute?"

Her fists were clenched tightly at her sides, and she looked from one to the other of us with eyes which were rapidly growing hysterical. "The lousy, stuck up bum," she said. "He thought he was too good for me."

She took a step toward me, her mouth beginning to work uncontrollably. "The louse laughed at me. Me, who could get any man in town just by crooking my finger. I threw everything I had at him, but he just kept looking at me with that mocking expression on his face, like I was an amusing little tart, but not worth taking seriously. I even told him I'd leave Sam and never go with anybody but him. And you know what he said? He said, 'What in the devil would I want with everybody's girl friend?' "

Her hands moved to her face and she began to sob. "Oh God!" she whispered. "I loved him so."

Sam, his face white with shock, wrenched his eyes from the sobbing girl to glare at me. "You still got your orders, Captain. You ain't doing one damned thing about this."

Ignoring him, I said to Pat, "I'll give you five minutes to get your clothes on. We're going downtown."

"Let's see you argue with this," Sam said, and started to bring his hand out of his robe pocket.

I dropped sidewise, at the same instant flashing my hand toward my hip. The automatic Sam held roared just as I cleared the holster, and I felt the wind of the bullet passing over my head. He fired again, a

micro-second after the Detective Special jolted against my palm, but the slam of my bullet against the center of his chest threw off his aim and his shot went wild. The crash of his body to the floor coincided with the slam of the apartment's front door against the inner wall.

On my knees I spun in time to see Vic and Tony crowding through the doorway together, both bringing guns to bear. Tony was first, and I met him with a bullet just above his belt buckle. Staggering back against his partner, he disturbed Vic's aim just as the latter's automatic began to chatter like a machine gun. I heard Pat give a gasp, then was centering my gun on Vic's stomach and squeezing the trigger.

All of a sudden the fight was over.

Big Sam had been killed instantly, I discovered. Both Tony and Vic were breathing but unconscious, and both were probably fatally wounded, for both had bullets in their stomachs. Pat Rogers lay on her back, her upturned eyes sightless. Her white housecoat had been flung open, but the milk-white flesh would never again stir any man's emotions. A bullet from Vic Casale's wild volley had caught her squarely between the breasts.

I called headquarters, made my report and told them I wouldn't wait for the ambulance and the ice-wagon. If I were needed before morning, I could be reached at home. Then I drove home, put the convertible in the garage and sat on the front porch for a while.

I didn't try to do much thinking, for there wasn't much use in trying to think my way out. Flight didn't even occur to me, because there isn't any such thing as successful flight from the syndicate. It reaches everywhere, even overseas.

Idly I wondered how soon it would start, but I couldn't seem to get very concerned. The official action would have to take place first, of course. A plausible charge would have to be trumped up, then would come the boarding and dismissal from the force.

Probably a week or two would pass after that before the word went down through the grapevine that a bonus could be earned.

I looked out over the moonlit lake and decided I might have time to get in a little fishing.

Portrait of a Killer

No. 4 — Chester Jordan

BY DAN SONTUP

CHESTER JORDAN had a sweet little racket. His brother-in-law was a rich man, so Chester and his wife were able to take life easy. They lived in a little town near Boston, the brother-in-law lived in New York — but his wife, Chester's sister, saw to it that a steady flow of her husband's money was sent regularly to Chester.

So, the racket might have gone on indefinitely — but Chester spoiled it by becoming a killer.

Chester's wife had the cute habit of sneaking off to Boston and getting drunk. Chester didn't mind this at all. He and his wife never did get along, and Mrs. Jordan had a quick tongue that lashed out at Chester every time they quarreled — which they did with monotonous regularity. So, Chester cheerfully let his wife get loaded whenever she got the urge. He, himself, did the same, and he had lots of fun finding other women who were more understanding than his wife. Mrs. Jordan, meanwhile, got herself a man or two on the side just to keep the score evened up.

Things went on like this for a while, until early one evening Chester got a call from a bartender to come and get his wife. It seems that Mrs. Jordan had had a lot more than one too many, and she couldn't get home under her own power. This was nothing new to Chester. He had lugged his wife home many times in the past, so he took one last drink from the bottle which he had been emptying into himself in the kitchen of his home, put the cork back in the bottle, and set out to bring his wife back.

It was a rough trip back to the house, and when they had finally made it, Chester needed a drink badly. He propped his wife up against the wall, headed for the kitchen, and took the cork out of the bottle. He was sitting there, drinking slowly and joyfully, when his wife staggered into the kitchen. She looked at Chester, at the bottle, then opened her mouth and let loose with a string of curses at Chester. She and Chester had done a turn in burlesque before they had settled down to a life of ease, so Mrs. Jordan knew all the right words to use on him — and she went through the entire list. When she had finished, she took a deep breath, swiped a drink from Chester's bottle, and then started in all over again.

The joy was gone from Chester's drinking now, and he sat there staring off into space, the bottle clutched in his hand, while his wife's voice pounded away at him.

She finished the second round of cursing, grabbed the bottle from Chester again, and let the whiskey soothe her vocal cords for another try.

There was a heavy flatiron on the table near Chester. He glanced at it — and waited for his wife to begin again.

She didn't disappoint him. This time she seemed to have discovered some new forms of profanity, and she mixed these in with all the old ones in a steady stream. Just as she reached the peak of her tirade, Chester got up from his chair, reached for the flatiron, and threw it straight at her. Chester was a big man, standing well over six feet, and he threw the iron with all his strength.

The point of the iron caught his wife square on the head — and she crumpled to the floor without uttering a sound.

The kitchen was strangely quiet now, and Chester stood looking down at his wife. Then he picked up the flatiron, looked at it, hefted it in his hand — and then reached down and swung it twice at his wife's head.

He dropped the iron, knelt down on the floor, and put his ear on the ample chest of his wife. He listened, and he thought he could still detect a heartbeat. He got a mirror and held it to Mrs. Jordan's lips. When he took the mirror away, there was a slight film of moisture on it. Mrs. Jordan was still alive.

But Chester took care of that right away.

He put his big hands around his wife's throat and squeezed. He kept on squeezing, kneading his wife's throat in his fingers until his hands began to ache. Then he tried with the mirror again. There was no moisture this time.

He stood up, thought for a while, and then went and got a big butcher knife. There was a problem of disposal involved now, and even though he was getting drunk, Chester knew what he had to do.

He set to work with the knife, but it was slow work. He went down to the cellar and got a hacksaw, but this didn't speed things up too much. Chester was finding out that it takes training to be a butcher.

He worked for a couple of hours, but hadn't made much progress, and the only thing he had succeeded in doing was messing up the kitchen floor. He was thirsty now, but there wasn't enough whiskey left to do him much good. It was about ten in the evening by this time, so he knocked off work for a while and went out. He visited someone he knew in Boston, chatted calmly with him about business matters, and then set out for home about midnight.

He picked up another bottle on the way, and when he got home,

checked the kitchen, and then went into the living room and sat down and began drinking again.

About three hours later, he was good and soused, and he staggered up to his bed and fell asleep.

When he awoke about ten in the morning, he had another drink and then went back to his work in the kitchen. He worked steadily for most of the day, taking a break for lunch around the middle of the day.

Late in the afternoon, he had finished, and he went upstairs and brought down a huge wardrobe trunk. His wife was now separated into twelve different parts, and he placed the twelve sections of the body into the trunk and covered them with some old clothes of hers.

He had some sort of weird plan to get rid of the trunk somewhere at sea. To do this, he decided to take one of the boats that ran from Boston to New York. He would get an outside stateroom, and then, at night, quietly drop his wife overboard — piece by piece.

The plan might have worked, but one snag developed. Chester had no trouble getting the trunk picked up by a taxi, which took him to the boat, and he asked the driver to help him aboard with his trunk. But they found out that the trunk couldn't fit into the room, and Chester had to take it off the boat and back into the cab. Then he told the driver to take him to a rooming house, and Chester deposited the trunk there. The cab driver left, and Chester sat down on the trunk to think things over.

He didn't have long to do this, though. The cab driver had become suspicious, and he returned quickly with a policeman in tow.

After that, things moved swiftly. The policeman made Chester open the trunk, and when the body of his wife was discovered, Chester had reached the end of the line.

His rich brother-in-law made a good try to keep Chester from the chair — but all he succeeded in doing was to delay things for a long while and spend a lot of money on lawyers.

Chester finally was sent to the chair — and he died very neatly and quickly and all in one piece.

Hatred isn't always the reason. Sometimes a love that's too strong can provide

The Motive

BY
ERSKINE CALDWELL

IN ribbon after ribbon of gleaming white foam, the surf rolled in from the blue Gulf and, each time for lingering moments, spread patterns of delicate lace on the broad beach. It was Sunday, but it was near the end of the season at Seahorse Beach; most of the vacationists had left, and only a few guests remained in the tall resort hotel. Three or four fishing boats bobbed like huge white corks on the swells of the blue water, and several gulls glided lazily along the foreshore.

Van Rollins sat up in bed and gazed downward from the tenth-floor window. "Wish I could stay here another day," he said with a wistful expression on his tanned face. "I'd like to get down there and splash around in the water. It sure looks good."

"We've been here three days, Van," Kathy reminded him. "We could've gone swimming yesterday or today, or even both times."

"That's right," he said. "And we haven't been out of this room for forty-eight hours, have we?" He shook his head. "Oh, well. There'll be other times, other places. But always the same beautiful girl — that wondrous work of nature."

Kathy smiled happily. "Now, Van, why do you always say that?"

He winked at her, and then he moved away from the window and reached for the whisky bottle on the table. It was empty.

"Look at that, would you?" he said. "It's all gone again. Phone down and tell them to send up a couple more, will you, Kathy, and plenty of ice, too. Tell them to get busy and make some new ice — the last ice they sent up here was all old and squashy. Imagine what life would be like if there wasn't another drop of whisky left in the world, and only squashy ice."

Kathy went to the phone and ordered the whisky and hard ice. When she finished, she sat down on the side of the bed.

"Van, I want to talk to you about something important," she said nervously. "It's very important."

"If it's something that important, why didn't you tell me about it when you got here the other night?"

"I didn't want to do anything that would — well, anything that might spoil our week end this time."

"You talk so serious, Kathy." He stuffed the pillows behind his back with energetic movements of his arms. After that he regarded her with his searching dark eyes while she nervously fingered the hem of her dressing gown. "What's the trouble, Kathy?" he asked, concerned, after a while.

She drew the mauve gown more closely around her, at the same time shaking her dark brown hair backward from her face. She looked childlike and fragile, sitting there on the edge of the big double bed.

"Van, I want to get married," she stated forthrightly, but being careful to avoid his penetrating gaze.

"Now, Kathy," he said with an annoyed frown as he reached for her. Knowing what to expect, she quickly moved backward beyond his reach. He leaned back against the pillows again. "Kathy, you know all about that. Why bring it up now? There's no sense dragging ourselves through that again. I've got a wife, I've got four children, and I can't afford to break up my family. Besides, it wouldn't be an intelligent move, businesswise. You know all that. Let's not get all on edge about something that can't be changed. We've known each other for nearly five years now, and we still get along fine every time we get together, don't we? I meet you three or four or five times a year, somewhere like this, and we stay together for a week end. What more can a girl want these days — under the circumstances?"

"I'm not talking about that, Van," she said, still forcing herself not to look at him. She knew she cared so much for him that it would hurt her to see him displeased and unhappy. "It's something else, Van."

"Then what are you talking about, Kathy?" he asked, perturbed. "You said you wanted to get married, didn't you?"

Taking a deep breath, she looked directly at him. "I want to marry somebody else, Van."

He stared at her, completely amazed; after a while a disbelieving smile came to his face.

"That's a funny thing for you to say, after we've meant so much to each other all these years. Don't you think we get along fine together, Kathy? Be honest now. Be truthful. Sure, we do. You've always said that."

"Van, I'm twenty-eight now, and in two more years I'll be thirty —"

"And in two more years you'll be even more beautiful and wondrous, and I'll be just as crazy about you as I ever was. Time improves the wondrous work of nature."

"Please try to understand, Van. It frightens me to think that I'll soon be thirty years old. That's why I want to get married now — while I can. That's what I really mean — while I can."

"Who's this you're talking about marrying, Kathy?"

"It wouldn't mean anything to you if I told you his name. You don't know him, and you've never heard of him. He doesn't have an important job like yours, and he doesn't make a lot of money. He lives back home."

"What is he — a locally renowned turpentine-and-rosin man up there in those Alabamey piney woods?"

"No, he's not a business man. He's a lawyer in our little town. He's a widower, and he's about your own age, Van. He's forty-one. He's been very kind to me. And he's asked me to marry him."

"Who wouldn't be kind to you and ask you to marry him — to get his hands on a wondrous work of nature like you!"

"So far he hasn't meant anything like that to me at all, Van," she told him earnestly, hoping he would believe her. "I mean, in the way you're thinking. There hasn't been anything like that. You know I wouldn't be dishonest with you, Van."

"Why do you want to marry him? Why him?"

"Because nobody else has asked me."

"Don't make me feel like a damn scoundrel, Kathy. It makes me feel awfully bad. You know I can't divorce my wife and marry you. I can't afford to break up my family like that. I've got those four children growing up. I've got to think of them. And it wouldn't help me businesswise, either."

"I don't want you to feel badly, Van," she said, shaking her head sympathetically. "You know I don't. I'm too much in love with you to hurt you, if I can possibly help it. It's just that I've reached the point where I want to get married, before it's too late. You know a girl has to think of her youth, Van. After I'm thirty —"

"I know," he said, nodding and looking out the window. "I know, Kathy." He watched the gulls gliding over the foreshore while he was talking to her. "But why do you want to get married at all? Why can't you keep on meeting me every

couple of months, just like we've been doing? It's perfect this way. You know I travel a lot. I can always manage to meet you for a week end somewhere — here, New Orleans, Chicago, Atlanta, Miami, or almost anywhere. You've always said you like meeting me the way you do, haven't you?"

"I do like it, Van, because it means being with you, and I'd rather be with you than with anybody else in the world. I always feel so secure, and loved. It's the most wonderful thing in life to me. But I've got to think of the future now."

A waiter knocked on the door. Kathy got up and unlocked the door, and the waiter came in and placed the two bottles of whisky and the bowl of ice cubes on the table. Kathy signed the bill and gave him fifty cents from her purse. The waiter thanked her for the tip and gathered up the empty bottles and took them away with him. Neither of them said anything until the door had been closed and locked again.

"If I'd known this was going to happen, I would've sent for four bottles," Van remarked, laughing a little to himself. "We're going to need four bottles before we finish this. It's a four-bottle argument if there ever was one."

He poured large portions of whisky into two glasses, carelessly splashed ice cubes into the liquor, and handed one of the glasses to Kathy. She sipped the whisky slowly and deliberately.

"I can't let you do it, Kathy," he stated as though he fully expected her to abide by his decision. Then he lifted his glass to his mouth and drank all the whisky in it. "That's how I feel about it, Kathy. That's it."

"Don't talk like that, Van," she begged. "Please try to see my side of it."

"I don't want to see your side of it. I want to be selfish as hell about it. Why should I want to see your side? I don't want you leaving me to go off with somebody up there in those piney woods of Alabama. I should say I don't! You wouldn't meet me again after that."

"Of course I couldn't ever meet you again." She drew her breath quickly. "Of course I couldn't, Van!"

He shook his head more determinedly than ever. "That's the answer, Kathy. You can't do it."

"You've got to let me, Van!"

"I haven't got to," he said, speaking out angrily to her for the first time. "You're mine. You're going to stay mine. That's the way it's been, that's the way it is, and that's the way it's going to stay from now on." He was breathing rapidly when he stopped, and there was silence between them for a long time. He smiled at her after that, all anger vanishing, and immediately she felt as though she would remain incapable of resisting him as long as he lived. "The wise man has spoken, Kathy," he said lightly.

He put his arms around her and hugged her desperately. Presently Kathy pressed her face against him, and after that she put her arms around his neck and kissed him as though they had just that instant come together after having been parted for a long time.

"You get that crazy idea out of your mind, Kathy, and keep it out," he told her, assuming a gruff manner. "Forget it. You're my sweetheart, honey-babe. I'm not going to let you go off and be somebody else's. I know what's good for us, even if you pretend you don't."

"But if we can't marry — I've just got to think of the future. I'd like to have children, Van. And I don't want to end up being an old maid — I can't even stand the thought of it! I'm lonely all the time when I'm not with you — awfully lonely."

"Kathy, I give you everything you want, don't I? You've got a new car, a nice coat, and a lot of other things. You wouldn't even have to work in that office, if you didn't want to. I can take care of you. I make enough to go around. I'll always take care of you."

"No, Van," she said firmly. "No."

"Now, look here, honey-babe —"

She drew away from him and stood at the foot of the bed.

"Stop calling me that!"

"What do you want me to call you — Mrs. Somebody-Or-Other!"

"Yes!"

"Well, you're not going to be Mrs. Anybody! You're going to keep on being who you are right now — Miss Kathy Woodson!"

She turned away from the bed and walked to the other window. She stood looking down at the curving white beach and the blue water of the Gulf. Van, his anger passing, waited several minutes, and then he got up and went to her. He put his arms around her and held her tightly. Slowly turning to him as she always had the desire to do when he was close to her, she raised her lips to his and kissed him.

"Now, that's more like it, Kathy," he said later, taking her back to the bed and making her sit down beside him. "You know you don't want to go off and leave me and marry somebody else."

"Yes, I do, Van," she told him with renewed insistence. "I really do."

"Well, you're not! I said so!"

"I'll do it anyway, then."

"You will not!"

Tears filled her eyes. She covered her face with her hands.

"You'll get over this pretty soon, Kathy," he said, trying to comfort her. He kissed her cheeks and forehead and hands. "You'll be meeting me somewhere in about two months. Then you'll be glad that I wouldn't let you do this fool thing."

She pushed him from her and determinedly held him away with both hands.

"No, Van. I've met you for the last time. I'll never see you again

after this. As soon as I get back home, I'm going to marry —"

"If you do, I swear I'll come up there and break every bone in that shyster's head!"

"No, you wouldn't do that, Van. You wouldn't make trouble like that. You know you wouldn't, for my sake."

"Kathy," he pleaded solemnly, "I'll do anything in the world for you, if you'll forget all about this fool thing. All you have to do is name it, and I'll do it for you. That's a promise if I ever made one."

"Will you marry me?"

"Now, Kathy, please don't start that again."

"Then remember what I said I was going to do when I get back home this time."

Van picked up his glass and poured more whisky into it. Taking several ice cubes from the bowl, he threw them, splashing, into the glass. Then he drank all the whisky in it.

"Kathy, I've got to leave in a couple of hours. I've got to be in New Orleans at nine o'clock in the morning. Sales conference. Regional meeting. Now, let's not spoil the next few hours by arguing about that fool thing any more. It'll be nearly two months before I see you again, and it's going to be —"

"I don't want to spoil things, either, Van," she told him in an intense voice. "But I've got to do what my sense tells me to do. I'm going home tomorrow and —"

"If I have to drop everything and come up there in those piney woods, I'll take that fellow apart piece by piece. I'm not joking, Kathy. There won't be anything left of that shyster for miles around."

"Please don't talk like that, Van," she begged. "This means everything to me."

"Kathy, I'll make you happy as long as you live. I'll make you so happy that you'll think you're floating on clouds day and night for the rest of your life. You're happy right now — as happy as happy can be — and you know you are. Anybody could look at you and see how happy you are this minute. I'm going to keep you that way. I'm not going to give you up and let somebody else take you over. Not a wondrous work of nature like you. I'm not that kind. The people in my business will tell you that when Van Rollins sets his sights on something, he takes it over, no matter what the competition or resistance is. That's why I hold down the top sales job in my company, and they're getting ready to make me a vice-president just because of that. I set a quota for the whole country — from New York to San Francisco — and then I get out on the road and see to it that the field makes the quota, hell or high water. Now, I set my sights on you, and you're mine, and don't you forget it. No piney-woods shyster is going to break down my quota."

Kathy, covering her face with her hands, fell across the bed.

After a while Van got dressed and

packed his two suitcases. It was becoming dark then, and he walked to the window and looked at the early stars twinkling over the Gulf. Near the horizon, a new moon was rising. He went back and closed the suitcases.

When he was ready to leave, he lifted Kathy into his arms and held her close to him. They clung to each other for a long time, and then, her whole body trembling, she put her arms around his neck and kissed him fervently.

"I love you so much, darling," she whispered. "I've never loved anybody else like this. As long as I live I'll never love anybody else the way I love you. Darling — darling!"

"You still don't want to marry that shyster up there, do you, Kathy?"

"Yes, Van," she told him, trying to remain calm. "I've *got to* — I can't help it!"

"Then I'll help it. Listen to me now. You forget all about marrying him or anybody else. I want you to meet me in Chicago or St. Louis about two months from now. I'll let you know the exact time and place, and send you the airplane ticket."

"No, Van! No!"

"And when you check out of here tomorrow morning, sign the hotel bill and give it to the cashier. I'll tell him to mail it to me at the home office."

"Please, Van! Please let me marry him! Please, for my sake!"

"It can't be done, Kathy. And that's final. I've got to go catch that train to New Orleans now. Good-by, honey-babe. Take care of yourself. I'll see you in a couple of months."

He kissed her again and again she clung to him.

Finally, he left her and picked up the suitcases.

Kathy sat up erectly on the bed, watching breathlessly as he went toward the door.

"Darling —" she said fondly. "Oh, darling!"

"I feel the same way about you, Kathy," he told her while her heart throbbed with a painful feeling. He stood in the doorway, appealing and handsome in his dark gray suit, and looked at her longingly. "That's why I'm going to keep you — for us. Now, you be sure to take good care of yourself, and in a couple of months . . ."

She did not know if he said anything after that, but she could see him, tall and manful, going into the hall. Then the door was closed. The moment he had gone from sight she fell face downward upon the bed in the desolate room and cried as she had never cried before.

Chase by Night

They'd hurt his wife, so he was out to get them. It was as simple — and dangerous — as that.

BY

JACK M. BAGBY

STEVE flipped a half-smoked cigarette far out into the summer darkness, and dropped his feet from the porch rail. For the third time in fifteen minutes, he glanced at his watch in the light flowing through the open door. Nine twenty-five. The dinner-meetings of Nancy's club almost never lasted past eight.

He paced twice across the porch and lit another cigarette. For a moment he considered the dark shape of his car parked in the driveway, then dropped impatiently back into the lounge chair. One of the girls had offered her a ride. They were at someone's house, chatting. It would only embarrass Nancy if he went looking for her.

Steve cursed quietly, remembering the way he'd let his wife persuade him she should walk to the downtown restaurant where the girls met each month.

"Silly," she'd chided, wrinkling her nose at him. "It's only a few blocks, and I'll probably get a lift home. If not, it's still better for me to walk. Dr. Carlisle said so."

He looked at his watch again. Nine thirty-three.

"Hell!" Rising, he flipped a cigarette once more over the railing, strolled down the steps and out to the sidewalk.

A block down the street a door slammed, and a souped-up roadster roared away from the curb. The headlights glared and swept beyond him, and he noted absently the twin red fender guides as the car screamed past. Its special-toned mufflers thundered and faded in the distance.

Then he saw her. Nancy was running toward him, stumbling, falling, getting up, falling again. Nancy, calling faintly to him in sobbing gasps.

Steve was at her side in seconds. He pounded down the sidewalk, fear gripping his chest, and caught her just as she stumbled again.

"Nancy! Nan —" He lifted her easily, conscious of the bare flesh against his arm. Her blouse and torn slip hung in shreds from one shoulder.

"Steve, Steve, Steve," she sobbed, over and over.

As he carried her past a street light, Steve winced at the sight of the streak of dried blood across her cheek. It formed a ragged "X" with a hanging lock of hair. One of her white shoes was gone.

"Nancy, baby." He held her closer and quickened his steps.

Between the shuddering sobs, she gasped hysterical phrases. "They — pulled me — into the car. I screamed — Steve, I screamed for you. I tried to fight — I tried — oh, Steve, I tried —"

"There, baby, it's okay. It's okay now —"

The soothing words caressed her, but Steve spoke them automatically; his thoughts were suddenly racing. The roadster. The hot-rod with fender guides and the Smitty mufflers. Dark-colored.

His arms tightened savagely about her as he stumbled up the porch stairs and into the house.

Fumbling in his haste and anxiety, Steve slipped off all that remained of her clothes. The sight of the purple bruise under one breast made him clench his teeth until they ached. Gently he helped her into bed. She was sobbing more quietly now, but horror lingered in her eyes. They followed him as he leaned over her, brushed her forehead with his lips and walked into the living room to call the doctor.

Returning, Steve sat on the edge of the bed and leaned close to his wife. Nancy closed her eyes and attempted a weak smile that turned to a grimace of pain when it reached the stiffening cut on her cheek.

"Darling."

Steve's voice was urgent.

"Listen; please try to think. What did they look like? How many were there? Did you catch any names? Please, sweetheart, I've — got to tell the police."

At the forced memory, the racking sobs returned. Nancy turned her head away and fought silently, wearily to control them. Steve waited, gently stroking her dark hair. Only the broken moans, for minute after long minute. Finally they subsided, and she looked up at him.

"There were — three," she whispered. "One had a little moustache. The others —" Pain flowed back into her eyes, and she shut them again, rocking her head violently from side to side on the pillow.

"I don't know, I don't know," she sobbed.

"Think, Nan. Please, darling, think!" He gripped her hand. 'Names. Did you hear them talk? Did they —"

"Ed." Her eyes flew open. "I heard one of them call another one Ed." She sank back. "I don't know which one."

The front screen door clicked, and Nancy's fingernails bit deep into Steve's palm.

"It's okay, baby," he said. "It's only the doctor."

He rose, but Dr. Carlisle was already at the bedroom door. The elderly man flicked a keen glance over Steve's face, then mustered a cheery greeting for the girl in the bed. Steve stepped forward, but the doctor motioned him to the other room.

A few minutes later the other man joined him.

"No serious injuries," he said. "It's a little early to tell, but I think the baby will be all right, too. I gave Nancy a sedative."

Steve felt a wave of relief that failed to interrupt his thoughts.

"Thanks, doc."

"You've called the police?"

Steve looked up quickly.

"No. No, there's no use in them coming here. I think I found out all she knows. I'd rather go to them. Will you stay with her, doctor? I have to go. Now."

For a long second, the older man studied Steve's face. Then he nodded, slowly.

"Thanks, doc," Steve said, softly. "Thanks very much."

He walked into the bedroom and stood looking down at Nancy. She was asleep, breathing deeply, a faint color returning to her cheeks under the fresh white bandage. For several seconds he stood there. Then he picked up a jacket and strode rapidly through the house and out the front door, not glancing at Dr. Carlisle.

Outside, Steve stopped by his car and shook his head. He could still see the roadster as it had swept by in the darkness. How had it looked? He remembered a vague impression of redness as the street light glinted off the fender. It must have been dark red or maroon.

A town this size might have a dozen cars like that. But where would he start looking for it? Where would they go afterwards? Not home . . . no. They'd go somewhere to celebrate — maybe someplace a few miles out of town to drink and talk about what they had done. Big shots.

Steve opened the car door and slid behind the wheel. He could cover every likely place within fifteen miles before closing time.

It was nearly two hours later, at the fifth roadside night spot he'd visited, when he spotted the roadster. A maroon Ford was parked among a crowd of cars in the graveled parking lot.

Steve swung into the lot and backed his big sedan into the empty space beside the car. Then he pulled forward and backed up again at an angle. Shutting off his motor, he slid

out and looked over the roadster.

Chrome-plated fender guides, with red plastic tops, jutted up from each front fender. Two highly-polished exhaust extensions projected from beneath the ornamented rear bumper. He glanced into the car.

A woman's white shoe was jammed into the corner of the rear seat.

Steve stood motionless, his gaze fixed on the shoe. Slowly, he felt all of the nervous tension drain from him, to be replaced by an icy hate. He clenched his fist, then turned and headed for the neon-bordered door some fifty yards away.

The tavern was crowded, but Steve picked his way through the noisy, dimly-lit room and found an empty stool at the bar. He downed a double shot and ordered another. Not until it came did he allow himself to swing casually around and survey the room.

A dozen couples were dancing languidly through the blue haze that covered the tiny dance floor. In a corner of the room at his right, a juke box blared, barely penetrating the jumble of voices and laughter.

From the corner, his gaze moved slowly to the small booths, shadowed cubicles of false privacy, along the opposite wall.

A middle-aged man, leering at a chattering brunette as he stroked her hand across the table.

Two teenage couples, clowning.

A drunk mumbling soberly to an absent companion.

A man arguing intently with a girl who smiled brightly, but kept shaking her head.

An empty booth.

Three men talking earnestly, their heads close together over the table.

Steve forced his glance on past them and swung back around to the bar. His eyes found the booth again in the mirror behind the rows of bottles. He tossed off his drink without shifting his gaze, and set down the glass with a thump that drew a keen look from the bartender.

Slipping from the stool, Steve strolled along the edge of the dance floor. At the far corner he paused and fumbled in his pocket for a coin, which he fed into the juke box.

When he turned back to the floor, his hair was slightly rumpled and his mouth held the slack expression of a man not quite drunk. He strolled on, now along the row of booths.

Steve's glance wandered aimlessly, now among the dancers, now along the booths. Occasionally he nodded and grinned at strangers who stared vacantly or grinned and nodded back.

A few yards from the booth he had marked, he paused and turned again to the dance floor. Hands thrust into his pockets, he stared with obvious approval at a couple glued passionately together, gliding through a beam of dim blue light. Then he resumed his stroll.

A few feet now. He fixed his eyes on an empty booth beyond the one in which the three men sat. His face

lighted in surprised recognition and he lifted his hand in greeting.

"Ed!" he shouted gaily. "H'are ya, Ed?"

Without looking at them, Steve saw one of the men abruptly break off his low conversation and jerk his head upward. The broad face was topped with blond hair, trimmed short in a crew haircut. The other two also looked up. One had a small moustache. When the three saw the slightly tipsy man looking at someone beyond them, they turned back and picked up their conversation. Steve strode past them and out the door.

He was sitting in the car, smoking his second cigarette, when the trio came out. Quickly, he stubbed out the smoke, switched on the ignition and waited.

The three men were young, he noted absently, somewhere in their early twenties. At the same moment, and with a faint feeling of surprise, he realized he was probably no more than four or five years older. Yet the classification he had immediately assigned them stuck in his mind.

"Punks," he thought contemptuously. "Young punks."

He pressed the starter button and eased the automatic drive lever into reverse. The youths were less than a dozen yards from their car when he tramped down, hard, on the accelerator.

The car shot backward, and Steve felt the satisfying crunch of chrome and polished metal as his rear bumper smashed in the side of the roadster.

The three men halted an instant in stunned surprise, then ran toward him, shouting angrily. Steve threw the car into gear and showered them with gravel as he roared forward out of the parking lot.

In his rear-view mirror, Steve saw them scramble into the roadster with scarcely a pause to inspect the damage. The Ford's headlights flared as it careened onto the highway behind him.

He smiled at them, almost tenderly, in the mirror and let his car slow a little. Ahead of him the gray highway stretched into the darkness beyond his headlights. Behind him the roadster's lights grew rapidly. He speeded up.

The tight hate in his chest had disappeared. He felt relaxed, confident in his resolve and the smooth power beneath him. He looked at the gleaming dash and smiled. The speedometer needle quivered at 70.

He looked at the lights in the rear-view mirror and almost laughed. "Not 'til I'm ready," he said. That hopped-up jalopy couldn't catch him until he wanted it to. They might take him on a closed racetrack but not on an open highway that he knew like this one.

The needle passed the 75 mark.

"Now let's use that extra 50 horses under the hood," he murmured. The roadster was pulling ten years to his car's one, and he knew he could keep ahead. The highway hummed by

under the wheels and the headlights leaped eagerly at the darkness. The other lights kept their position behind.

The needle touched 80, then fell back as he braked slightly for a curve. All four tires screamed.

Behind him, the other car's headlights gained ground, reflecting brighter in the mirror. The road was beginning to climb. He might take the curves faster, he thought, feeling almost gay. "But then I wouldn't want my friends to get discouraged," he said aloud.

He braked hard as a sharper curve leaped out of the darkness. The car lights swept momentarily over a black pit of nothing and again picked up the highway. The lights behind moved up closer, dropped back.

His headlights picked up a sign with an arrow pointing off to the left. It said, "To The Lake." As it flashed past, he thought, "That's where Nan caught her first fish."

Abruptly he wished that he hadn't remembered that, hadn't thought of her name. The jocular, reckless mood of adventure was gone. For the first time since he had waited grimly in the car outside the tavern, he was conscious of the deadly purpose behind the wild pursuit.

A straight stretch was coming up soon — for a couple of miles. He eased the wheel expertly to the left and then to the right, and shrieking rubber responded to the curves.

He glanced at the mirror again. The headlights behind him tilted a little, righted, rocked the other way and righted again, each time moving closer.

The cars screamed around another bend, and the highway leaped straight ahead, rising in a slight, steady pull. A vertical wall of rock began to flash by in the left side of the headlights' glare, but on the right the shoulder of light gravel drew a sharp line between the paving and the blackness beyond.

"Got to gain it all here," Steve murmured. The speedometer needle wavered at 80, moved slowly on to the glowing 90 on the dial. He flicked another glance at the mirror. The roadster had dropped back several hundred yards. He leaned forward, tensing.

"Not far now," he thought. The other car had shrunk to a pair of glowing spots far behind. "Not far —"

Then he saw it — the quick gleam of a reflector far ahead on the right. The first post of the guard rail. The glare of the warning sign. The road beginning its sharp curve to the left around the shoulder of the mountain.

He forced himself to hold down on the gas pedal. The rail hurtled past him and the lights in the mirror winked out behind the wall of rock. At the last possible instant he jerked his foot up and slammed down hard on the brake pedal.

The sudden deceleration threw him hard against the horn ring, but its blast was lost in the tortured

shriek of rubber as he fought to keep the lurching car on the road. The cliff's edge leaped at him beyond the white rail, moved away. He fought the wheel as the car skidded crazily toward the embankment and rocked back to the paving.

"Time it right — time it right," he prayed. And then —

"Now!"

He jerked the wheel savagely to the left, and the car broadsided. For agonizing yards it skidded sideways, its locked wheels howling. Then it rocked upward, teetered and dropped to a halt across the highway.

The rapidly brightening glow of the roadster's headlights was visible around the shoulder of the bend. For the space of a wink, the realization that the other car might smash straight into him flashed across Steve's mind, and was swiftly rejected.

"Too yellow," he said, and he knew, somehow, he was right. They'd try to make it between him and the guard rail, and — he glanced toward the flimsy fence — there wasn't that much room.

He stared at the widening glow of the oncoming lights, the ribbed plastic of the steering wheel digging into the palms of his hands. Only seconds had passed since he'd slammed his car to a wild stop across the highway, but they seemed like hours.

Suddenly the roadster's lights exploded around the curve and swerved to the far side of the road. The braked tires screamed as the roadster shot into the narrow space between the sedan and guard rail.

The rail broke with a crunch, and for a moment the lights hung in black emptiness, then plunged from sight. Steve heard a faint yell drift back, but this cut off sharply when the car crashed at the bottom of the cliff.

He let his breath go with relief and suddenly found he was trembling. He climbed out of the sedan and walked over to the side of the road. The feel of the ground under his feet steadied him.

At the edge he looked down at the roadster. Flames broke out as he watched, and in the rising light he could see three dark, crumpled figures.

One of them was twisted in the windshield and the other two lay motionless on the ground nearby.

He looked downward for a moment longer, and then turned and walked back to his car.

The Millionth Murder

The war was over, and the terror had begun. In this strange new world of tomorrow, Webb could see nothing but death ahead.

BY RAY BRADBURY

A Novelette

THE raw carcasses, hung in the sunlight, brushed the car's windows as they drove past, vibrated with heat and red color in the green jungle air. The stench of rotting flesh gushed through the windows, and Leonora Webb quickly pressed the button that whispered her door window up.

"Good Lord," she said. "Those open air butcher shops."

The smell was still in the car, a smell of horror.

"Did you see the flies?" she asked.

"When you buy any kind of meat in those markets," John Webb said, "you slap the beef with your hand. The flies lift from the meat so you can get a look at it."

He turned the car around a lush bend in the green rain-jungle road.

"Do you think they'll let us into Juatala when we get there?"

"I don't know."

"Watch out!" Leonora cried suddenly.

He saw the bright metal points in the road too late, tried to swerve, but hit them. There was a terrible sighing from the right front tire, the car heaved about, and sank to a stop. He opened his side of the car and stepped out. The jungle was hot and silent and the highway empty, very empty and quiet at noon.

He walked to the front of the car and bent, all the while checking his revolver in its underarm holster.

Leonora's window gleamed down. "Is the tire cut much?"

"Ruined!" He picked up the bright thing that had stabbed and slashed the tire.

"Pieces of a broken machete," he said, "placed in adobe holders pointing toward our car wheels. We're lucky it didn't get *all* our tires."

"But *why?*"

"You know as well as I." He nodded to the newspaper beside her, at the date, the headlines:

"UNITED STATES, EUROPE SILENT!

"*The radios of the U. S. A. and Europe are dead.*

"*There is a great silence. The War has spent itself.*

"*It is believed that most of the population of the United States is gone. It is also believed that Europe, as such, is through. The white people of the earth are dead. Now is our time for rejoicing!*"

They both looked at the jungle.

The jungle looked back at them with a vastness, a breathing moss and leaf silence, with a billion diamond and emerald insect eyes.

"Be careful, Johnny!"

He went to work quickly, skillfully, rolling out his spare and taking off the cut tire. It was a matter of moments to lock the spare in place and roll the shattered tire back to the luggage box. He had his gun out while he did all this.

"Don't stand in the open, please, Johnny!"

"So it's starting already." He felt his face turn burning-hot. "News travels fast."

"For God's sake," said Leonora. "They can *hear* you!"

He turned to the jungle.

"I know you're in there!" he said.

"Johnny! Get back in out of the open."

He aimed at the silent jungle. "I see you!" He fired four, five times, quickly, wildly.

The jungle ate the bullets with hardly a quiver, a brief slit sound like torn silk where the bullets bored and vanished into a million acres of green leaves, tree-silence, and moist earth. The brief echo of the shots

died. Only the car muttered its exhaust behind Webb. He walked around the car, got in, shut the door and locked it.

He reloaded the gun, sitting in the front seat. Then they drove away from the place.

They drove steadily.

"Did you see anyone?"

"No. You?"

She shook her head.

"You're going too fast."

He slowed only in time. As they rounded a curve another clump of the bright flashing objects filled the right side of the road. He swerved to the left and passed.

"Sons-of-bitches!"

"They're not sons-of-bitches, they're just people who never had a car like this or anything at all."

Something ticked across the window pane.

There was a streak of colorless liquid on the glass.

Leonora glanced up. "Is it going to rain?"

"No, an insect hit the pane."

Another tick.

"Are you sure that was an insect?"

Tick, tick, tick.

"Shut the window!" he said, speeding up.

Something fell in her lap.

She looked down at it. He reached over to touch the thing. "Quick!"

She pressed the button. The window snapped up.

Then she examined her lap again. The tiny dart glistened there.

"Don't get any of the liquid on you," he said. "Wrap it in your handkerchief — we'll throw it away later."

He had the car up to sixty miles an hour.

"If we hit another road block, we're done."

"This is a local thing," he said. "We'll drive out of it."

The panes were ticking all the time. A shower of things blew at the window and fell away in their speed.

"Why," said Leonora Webb, "they don't even *know* us!"

"I only wish they did." He gripped the wheel. "It's hard to kill people you know."

"I don't want to die," she said simply, sitting there.

He put his hand inside his coat. "If anything happens to me, my gun is here. Use it, for God's sake, and don't waste time."

She moved over close to him and they drove seventy-five miles an hour down a straight stretch in the jungle road, saying nothing.

2.

With the windows up, the heat was oven-thick in the car.

"It's so silly," she said, at last. "Putting the knives in the road. Trying to hit us with the blowguns. How could they know that the next car along would be driven by white people?"

"Don't ask them to be that logical," he said. "A car is a car. It's

big, it's rich. The money in one car would last them a lifetime. And anyway, if you road-block a car, chances are you'll get either an American tourist or a rich Spaniard, comparatively speaking, whose ancestors should have behaved better. And if you happen to road-block another Indian, hell, all you do is go out and help him change tires."

"What time is it?" she asked.

For the thousandth time he glanced at his empty wrist. Without expression or surprise, he fished in his coat pocket for the glistening gold watch with the silent sweep hand. A year ago he had seen a native stare at this watch and stare at it and stare at it with almost a hunger. Then the native had examined him, not scowling, not hating, not sad or happy; nothing except puzzled.

He had taken the watch off that day and never worn it since.

"Noon," he said.

Noon.

The border lay ahead. They saw it and both cried out at once. They pulled up, smiling, not knowing they smiled . . .

John Webb leaned out the window, started gesturing to the guard at the border station, caught himself, and got out of his car. He walked ahead to the station where three young men, very short, in lumpy uniforms, stood talking. They did not look up at Webb, who stopped before them. They continued conversing in Spanish, ignoring him.

"I beg your pardon," said John Webb at last. "Can we pass over the border into Juatala?"

One of the men turned for a moment. "Sorry, senor."

The three men talked again.

"You don't understand," said Webb, touching the first man's elbow. "We've *got* to get through."

The man shook his head. "Passports are no longer good. Why should you want to leave our country, anyway?"

"It was announced on the radio. All North Americans to leave the country, immediately."

"Ah, *si*, *si*." All three soldiers nodded and leered at each other with shining eyes.

"Or be fined or imprisoned, or both," said Webb.

"We could let you over the border, but Juatala would give you twenty-four hours to leave, also. If you don't believe me, listen!" The guard turned and called across the border, "Hey, there! Hey!"

In the hot sun, forty yards distant, a pacing man turned, his rifle in his arms.

"Hey there, Paco, you want a white man and woman?"

"No, *gracias*, — thank you, no," replied the man, smiling.

"You see?" said the guard, turning to John Webb.

All of the soldiers laughed together.

"I have money," said Webb.

The men stopped laughing.

The first guard stepped up to

John Webb and his face was now not relaxed or easy, it was like a brown stone.

"Yes," he said. "You always have money. I know. You come here and you think money will do everything. But what is money? It is only a promise, senor. This I know from books. And when somebody no longer likes your promise, what then?"

"I will give you anything you ask."

"Will you?" The guard turned to his friends. "He will give me *anything* I ask." To Webb: "It was a joke. *We* were always a joke to you, weren't we?"

"No."

"*Manana*, you laughed at us; *manana;* you laughed at our siestas and our *mananas*, didn't you?"

"Not me. Someone else."

"Yes, you."

"I've never been to this particular station before."

"I know you, anyway. Run here, do this, do that. Oh, here's a peso, buy yourself a house. Run over there, do this, do that."

"It wasn't me."

"He looked like you, anyway."

They stood in the sun with their shadows dark under them, and the perspiration coloring their armpits. The soldier moved closer to John Webb. "I don't have to do anything for you any more."

"You never had to before. I never asked it."

"You're trembling, senor."

"I'm all right. It's the sun."

"How much money have you got?" asked the guard.

"A thousand pesos to let us through, and a thousand for the other man over there."

The guard turned again. "Will a thousand pesos be enough?"

"No," said the other guard. "Tell him to go tell the State Department of his country!"

"Yes," said the guard, back to Webb again. "Report me to your Ambassador at your Embassy. Get me fired. I was fired once, years ago, by you."

"It was someone else."

"Take my name. It is Carlos Rodriguez Ysotl. Report that to your Government. Run to them as you've always run to them. Go on."

"I see," said John Webb.

"No, you don't see," said Carlos Rodriguez Ysotl. "Now give me the two thousand pesos."

John Webb took out his wallet and handed over the money. Carlos Rodriguez Ysotl licked his thumb and counted the money slowly under the blue glazed sky of his country as noon deepened and sweat arose from hidden sources and people breathed and panted above their shadows.

"Two thousand pesos." He tore it into many pieces and let them flutter to the ground. "Now turn your car around and head for another border."

John Webb walked slowly back to the car, slid into the seat.

"What're we going to do?"

"Rot. Or try to reach Porto Bello."

"But we need gas and our spare fixed. And going back over those highways. . . This time they might drop logs, and —"

"I know, I know." He rubbed his eyes and sat for a moment with his head in his hands. "We're alone, my God, we're alone. Remember how safe we used to feel? How safe? We registered in all the big towns with the American Consuls. Remember how the joke went? 'Everywhere you go you can hear the rustle of the eagle's wings!' Or was it the sound of paper money? I forget. Jesus, Jesus, the world got empty awfully quick. Who do I call on now?"

She waited a moment and then said, "I guess just me. That's not much."

He put his arm around her. "You've been swell. No hysterics, nothing."

"Tonight maybe I'll be screaming, when we're in bed, if we ever find a bed again. It's been a million miles since breakfast." He kissed her, twice, on her dry mouth. Then he sat slowly back. "First thing is to try to find gas. If we can get that, we're ready to head for Porto Bello."

The three soldiers were talking and joking as they drove away.

After they had been driving a minute, he began to laugh quietly.

"What were you thinking?" asked his wife.

"I remember an old spiritual. It goes like this:

'I went to the Rock to hide my face
And the Rock cried out, "No Hiding Place,
There's no Hiding Place down here."

"I remember that," she said.

"It's an appropriate song right now," he said. "I'd sing the whole thing for you if I could remember it all. And if I felt like singing."

He put his foot harder to the accelerator.

3.

They stopped at a gas station and after a minute, when the attendant did not appear, John Webb honked the horn. Then, appalled, he snapped his hand away from the horn-ring, looking at it as if it was the hand of a leper.

"I shouldn't have done that."

The attendant appeared in the shadowy doorway of the gas station. Two other men appeared behind him.

The three men came out and walked around the car, looking at it, touching it, feeling it.

Their faces were like burnt copper in the daylight. They touched the resilient tires, they sniffed the rich new smell of the metal and upholstery.

"Senor," said the gas attendant at last.

"We'd like to buy some gas, please."

"We are all out of gas, senor."

"But your tank reads full. I see the gas in the glass container up there."

"We are all out of gas," said the man.

"I'll give you ten pesos a gallon!"

"*Gracias*, no."

"We haven't enough gas to get anywhere from here." Webb checked the gauge. "Not even a quarter gallon left. We'd better leave the car here and go into town and see what we can do there."

"I'll watch the car for you, senor," said the station attendant. "If you leave the keys."

"We can't do that!" said Leonora. "Can we?"

"I don't see what choice we have," Webb said. "We can stall it on the road and leave it to anyone who comes along, or leave it with this man."

"That's better," said the man.

They climbed out of the car and stood looking at it.

"It was a beautiful car," said John Webb.

"Very beautiful," said the man, his hand out for the keys. "I will take good care of it, senor."

"But, Johnny —"

She opened the back door and started to take out the luggage. Over her shoulder, he saw the bright travel stickers, the storm of color that had descended upon and covered the worn leather now after years of travel, after years of the best hotels in two dozen countries.

She tugged at the valises, perspiring, and he stopped her hands and they stood gasping there for a moment, in the open door of the car, looking at these fine rich suitcases, inside which were the beautiful tweeds and woollens and silks of their lives and living, the forty-dollar-an-ounce perfumes and the cool dark furs and the silvery golf shafts. Eight years was packed into each of the cases; eight years and a dozen parts they had played in Rio, in Paris, in Rome and Shanghai, but the part they played most frequently and best of all was the rich and buoyant, amazingly happy Webbs, the smiling people, the ones who could make that rarely balanced Martini known as the Sahara.

"We can't carry it all into town," he said. "We'll come back for it later. Later."

"But. . . ."

He silenced her by turning her away and starting her off down the road.

"But we can't leave it there, we can't leave all our luggage and we can't leave our car! Oh look here now," she said, "I'll roll up the windows and lock myself in the car, while you go for the gas. Why not?"

He stopped and glanced back at the three men standing by the car which blazed in the yellow sun. Their eyes were shining and looking at the woman.

"There's your answer," he said. "Come on."

"But you just *don't* walk off and leave a four thousand dollar automobile!" she cried.

He moved her along, holding her elbow firmly and with quiet decision. "A car is to travel in. When it's not traveling, it's useless. Right now, we've got to travel; that's everything. The car isn't worth a dime without gas in it. A pair of good strong legs is worth a hundred cars, if you use the legs. We've just begun to toss things overboard. We'll keep dropping ballast until there's nothing left to heave but our hides."

He let her go. She was walking steadily now, and she fell into step with him. "It's so strange. So strange. I haven't walked like this in years." She watched the motion of her feet beneath her, she watched the road pass by, she watched the jungle moving to either side, she watched her husband striding quickly along, until she seemed hypnotized by the steady rhythm. "But I guess you can learn anything over again," she said, at last.

The sun moved in the sky and they moved for a long while on the hot road. When he was quite ready, the husband began to think aloud. "You know, in a way, I feel it's good to be down to essentials. Now instead of worrying over a dozen damned things, it's just two items — you and me."

"Watch it, here comes a car — we'd better . . ."

They half turned, yelled, and jumped. They fell away from the highway and lay watching the automobile hurtle past at seventy miles an hour. Voices sang, men laughed, men shouted, waving. The car sped away into the dust and vanished around a curve, blaring its double horns again and again.

He helped her up and they stood in the quiet road.

"Did you see it?"

They watched the dust settle slowly.

"I hope they remember to change the oil and check the battery, at least. I hope they remember to put water in the radiator," she said, and paused. "They were singing, weren't they?"

He nodded. They stood blinking at the great dust cloud filtering down like yellow pollen upon their hands and arms. He saw a few bright splashes flick from her eyelids when she blinked.

"Don't," he said. "After all, it was only a machine."

"I loved it."

"We're always loving everything too much."

Walking, they passed a shattered wine-bottle which steamed freshly as they stepped over it.

4.

They entered the small town of Colonia on foot. They walked past the little shops, the butcher shop, the photographer's. People stopped and looked at them as they passed.

"Senor," said a man in the street, "I like your coat."

John Webb started to go on. The man held his elbow.

"I've never had a coat like that," said the man.

"I'm sorry," said John Webb.

"May I have the coat, senor?"

The man's eyes were firm and his mouth was a line now; and his hand was behind his back, empty or not, there was no telling.

"Senor," he said quietly, "may I have the coat?"

John Webb hesitated only a moment longer. Then when he saw the small knot of muscle bunch at the corner of the man's mouth, he shrugged out of the coat and let it drop to the ground.

"Thank you, senor," said the man. "Now pick it up and give it to me."

Webb could feel the iron trembling in himself.

"The coat. Please hand it to me."

Webb bent and picked up the coat.

"Thank you." The man draped the coat over his thin brown arm. "It is a nice coat." He walked away.

Webb stood with his arms at his sides, his fingers opening and shutting into hard fists. He breathed through his mouth. He stared at the retreating open back, the contemptuous, lazy shoulder-area simply asking for it. His right hand moved up to the holster hidden under his shirt.

His wife stopped him. "Please, oh, please!" she said.

They walked on through the town, empty-handed.

The patio of the Hotel Esposa was cool as a grotto under a blue waterfall. In it birds sang, caged, and footsteps echoed like small rifle shots, clear and smooth.

"I stopped here once many years ago," said John Webb, helping his wife up the steps. They stood in the cool grotto, glad of the blue shade.

"Senor Esposa," said John Webb, when a fat man came forward from the desk, squinting at them. "Do you remember me — John Webb? Five years ago — we played cards one night."

"Of course, of course." They shook hands briefly.

"This is my wife," he explained. "We've had a bit of trouble, Mr. Esposa. We wonder if we could have a room for tonight only."

"Your money is always good here."

"You mean you'll actually give us a room? We'll pay in advance. We need rest. We need gas!"

Leonora picked at her husband's sleeve. "We haven't a car any more."

"Oh, yes." He fell silent for a long while. He sighed. "Never mind the gas. Is there a bus out of here for the Capital soon?"

"All will be attended to, in time," said the Manager nervously. "This way."

As they were climbing the stairs they heard a noise. Looking out, there riding around and around the

plaza, eight times, was their car, loaded with men who were shouting and singing and hanging onto the front fenders, laughing. Children and dogs ran after the car.

"I would like to own a car like that," said Mr. Esposa.

He poured a little cool wine for the three of them standing in the room on the third floor of the Esposa Hotel.

"To change," said Senor Esposa.

"I'll drink to that."

They drank. Senor Esposa licked his lips and wiped them on his coat sleeve. "We are always surprised and saddened to see the world change. But now there is only a hotel wall between yourself and twenty million members of my country. You are safe for the night. Shower and have a good supper. I won't be able to keep you more than one night, to repay you for your kindness to me five years ago."

"After tomorrow — what?"

"I would not suggest you take the bus to the Capital. There are riots. Hunts in the streets for some of your friends. You shouldn't do anything but hide."

"Where?"

"That is a problem. The town will know you're here in another few hours. It would be fatal to me."

"We understand. It's good of you."

"If you need anything, call me." He drank the rest of the wine in his glass. "Finish the bottle," he said.

The fireworks began at nine that evening. First one skyrocket, then another soared into the dark sky and burst out upon the winds, building architectures of flame. Each skyrocket, at the top of its ride, cracked open and let out a formation of streamers in red and white flame that made something like the dome of a beautiful cathedral.

Leonora and John Webb stood by the open window in their unlit room, listening and watching. As the hour latened, more people streamed into the town from every road and path, and began roaming, arm in arm, around and around the plaza, singing, barking like dogs, crowing like roosters, and then falling down on the tile sidewalk, sitting there, laughing, their heads back again, while the skyrockets burnt explosive colors on the tilted faces. A brass band began to thump and wheeze.

"So here we are," said John Webb. "After a few hundred years of living high. So this is what's left of our supremacy — you and I in a dark room in a hotel three hundred miles inside a celebrating country."

"You've got to see their side of it."

"Oh, I've seen it ever since I was that high. In a way, I'm glad they're happy. God knows they've waited

long enough to be. But I wonder how long that happiness will last. Now that the scapegoat is gone, who will they blame for oppression, who will be handy and as obvious and as guilty as you and I and the man who lived in this room before us?"

"I don't know."

"We were so convenient. The man who rented this room last month, he was convenient, he stood out. He made loud jokes about the natives' siestas. He refused to learn even a smattering of Spanish. Let them learn English, by God, and speak like men, he said. And he drank too much and whored too much with this country's women." He broke off and moved back from the window. He stared at the room.

The furniture, he thought. Where *he* put his dirty shoes upon the sofa, where *he* burnt holes in the carpet with cigarettes, the wet spot on the wall near the bed, God knows what or how he did *that*. The chairs scarred and kicked. It wasn't *his* hotel or his room; it was borrowed, it meant nothing. So this son-of-a-bitch went around the country for the past one hundred years, a traveling commercial, a Chamber-of-Commerce, and now here *we* are, enough like him to be his brother and sister, and there *they* are down there on the night of the Butler's Ball. They don't know, or if they know they won't think of it, that tomorrow they'll be just as poor, just as oppressed as ever, that the whole machine will have shifted only into another gear.

Now the band had stopped playing below; a man had leaped up, shouting, on the bandstand. There was a flash of machetes and the brown gleam of half-naked bodies.

The man on the bandstand faced the hotel and looked up at the dark room window where John and Leonora Webb now stood back out of the intermittent flares.

The man shouted.

"What does he say?" she asked.

John Webb translated: " 'It is now a free world,' he says."

The man yelled.

John Webb translated again. "He says, 'We are free!' "

The man sprayed moisture from his mouth.

"He says, 'At last, at last, free!' "

The crowd murmured.

The man lifted himself on his toes and made a motion of breaking manacles.

"He says, 'We are owned by no one.' "

The man stared up at John Webb's room.

"He says, 'No one owns us, no one in all the world.' "

The crowd roared and the band began to play, and while it was playing, the man on the grandstand stood glaring up at the room window, with all of the hatred of his universe in his eyes.

5.

During the night there were fights and pummelings and voices lifted,

arguments and shots fired. John Webb lay awake and heard the voice of Senor Esposa below, reasoning, talking quietly, firmly. And then the fading away of the tumult, the last rockets in the sky, the last breakings of bottles on the cobbles.

At five in the morning the air was warming into a new day. There was the softest of taps on the bedroom door.

"It is me, Esposa," said a voice.

John Webb hesitated, half-dressed, numbed on his feet from lack of sleep, then opened the door.

"What a night, what a night!" said Senor Esposa, coming in, shaking his head, laughing gently. "Did you hear the noise? Yes? They tried to come up here to your room. I prevented this."

"Thank you," said Leonora, still in bed, turned to the wall.

"They were all old friends. I made an agreement with them, anyway. They were drunk enough and happy enough so they agreed to wait. I am to make a proposition to you two." Suddenly he seemed embarrassed. He moved to the window. "Everyone is sleeping late. A few are up. A few men. See them there on the far side of the plaza?"

John Webb looked out at the plaza. He saw the brown men talking quietly there about the weather, the world, the sun, this town, and perhaps the wine.

"Senor, have you ever been hungry in your life?

"For a day, once," Webb said.

"Only for a day. Have you always had a house to live in and a car to drive?"

"Until yesterday."

"Were you ever without a job?"

"Never."

"Did all of your brothers and sisters live to be twenty-one years old?"

"All of them."

"Even I," said Senor Esposa, "even *I* hate you a little bit now. For *I* have been without a home. *I* have been without a house. *I* have been hungry. *I* have three brothers and one sister buried in that graveyard on the hill beyond the town, all of tuberculosis before they were nine years old."

They glanced at the men in the plaza. "Now," said Senor Esposa, "I am no longer hungry or poor, I have a car, I am alive. But I am one in a thousand. What can *you* say to them out there today?"

"I'll try to think of something to say," Webb said. "We can't get used to being a minority."

"But, Senor, white people have always been a minority."

"We've never let ourselves think about our being a minority," said Webb. "And now it's hard to get used to the fact."

"You have behaved beautifully."

"Is that a virtue?"

"In the bullring yes, in war, yes, in anything like this, most assuredly yes. You do not complain, you do not make excuses. You do not run and make a spectacle of yourself. I

think you are both very brave."

The hotel manager sat down, slowly, helplessly.

"I've come to offer you the chance to settle down," he said.

"We wanted to move on, if possible."

The manager shrugged. "Those others have stolen your car and I can do nothing to get it back for you. You cannot get out of town. Remain then, and accept an offer of a position with my hotel."

John Webb smiled. "I don't know what to say. You don't think there is *any* way for us to move out?"

"It might be twenty years, Senor, or never again. You cannot exist here without money, food, lodging — am I right?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"Well, then, consider my hotel and my offer."

Leonora nodded her head. "It would tide us over."

"Well, tentatively, then, yes, I accept. What's the job?"

The manager arose, seriously. He shook their hands and walked to the door, unhappily.

"But the job," said John Webb. "You haven't explained."

"First," said the manager, "you will do the following things . . ."

"Yes?"

"Sweep the second floor halls. Clean out the waste baskets. Clean the toilets. At supper, report to the kitchen. During supper you will supply fresh water at the tables and clear away the used dishes."

John Webb did not move.

"Do this room first," said the manager. "Then, when you have cleaned here and in the halls, you will be shown your quarters in back."

Still John Webb did not move.

Senor Esposa said, "It is the best I could do. What more can you ask from me? Those others down there wanted both of you last night. Did you see the machetes — did you see their faces? You were lucky I bargained. I told them, why have *one* night's pleasure — why not a lifetime? I said, I shall employ them in my hotel for the rest of your lives. You can see them, every day, doing the work you once did, carrying water, scrubbing floors, washing dishes. It will make you happy all your lives to see them here in this town, growing old before they are forty, as your mothers and fathers grew old."

"You said *that!*"

"I saved your lives. Senor, senor, be thankful! Consider. Where will you go? The jungle? You will be dead in a few hours from the snakes. The road? Walk five hundred miles without food to a Capital that doesn't want you? You must face reality." The manager opened the door. "I offer you an honest job and you will be paid the standard wages of two pesos a day, plus meals. Would you rather be with me or out in the plaza at noon with our friends? Consider." The door was shut. Senor Esposa was gone.

Webb stood looking at the door for a long while. Then he walked to the chair and fumbled with the holster under the draped white shirt. The holster was empty. He held it in his hands and blinked at its emptiness and looked again at the door through which Senor Esposa had just passed. He went over and sat down on the bed beside his wife. He stretched out beside her and took her in his arms and kissed her, and they lay there, watching the room get brighter with the new day.

6.

At eleven o'clock in the morning, with the great doors on the windows of their room flung back, they began to dress. There was soap, towels, shaving equipment, even perfume in the bathroom, provided by Mr. Esposa.

John Webb shaved and dressed carefully.

At eleven-thirty he turned on the small radio near their bed. You could usually get New York or Cleveland, or Houston on such a radio. But the air was silent. John Webb turned the radio off.

"There's nothing to go back to — nothing to go back for — nothing."

His wife sat on a chair near the door, looking at the wall.

"We could stay here and work," he said.

She stirred at last. "No. We couldn't do that, not really. Could we?"

"No, I guess not."

"There's no way we could do that. We're being consistent, anyway; spoiled, but consistent."

He thought a moment. "We could make for the jungle."

"I don't think we can move from the hotel without being seen. We don't want to try to escape and be caught. It would be far worse that way."

He nodded.

They both sat a moment.

"It might not be too bad, working here," he said.

"What would we be living for? Everyone's dead — your father, mine, your mother, mine, your brothers, mine, all our friends, everything gone, everything we understood."

He nodded.

"Or if we took the job, one day soon one of the men would touch me and you'd go after him, you know you would. Or someone would do something to you, and *I'd* do something."

He nodded again.

They sat for fifteen minutes, talking quietly. Then at last, he picked up the telephone and ticked the cradle with his finger.

"Bueno," said a voice on the other end.

"Senor Esposa?"

"*Si.*"

"Senor Esposa," he paused and licked his lips, "tell your friends we will be leaving the hotel at noon."

The phone did not immediately

reply. Then with a sigh Senor Esposa said, "As you wish. You are sure—?"

The phone was silent for a full minute. Then it was picked up again and the manager said quietly, "My friends say they will be waiting for you on the far side of the plaza."

"We will meet them there," said John Webb.

"And Senor —"

"Yes."

"Do not hate me, do not hate us."

"I don't hate anybody."

"It is a bad world, senor. None of us know how we got here or what we are doing. These men don't know what they are mad at except they are mad. Forgive them and do not hate them."

"I don't hate them or you."

"Thank you, thank you." Perhaps the man on the far end of the telephone wire was crying; Webb could not tell. There were great lapses in his talking, in his breathing. After awhile he said, "We don't know why we do anything. Men hit each other for no reason except they are unhappy. Remember that. I am your friend. I would help you if I could. But I cannot. It would be me against the town. Goodbye, senor." He hung up.

John Webb sat in the chair with his hand on the silent phone. It was a moment before he glanced up. It was a moment before his eyes focused on an object immediately before him. When he saw it clearly, he still did not move but sat regarding it, until a look of immensely tired irony appeared on his mouth. "Look here," he said at last.

Leonora followed his motion, his pointing, as he said, "I guess they've got the right man after all."

They both sat looking at his cigarette which, neglected on the rim of the table while he telephoned, had burnt down so that now it had charred a black hole in the clean surface of the wood.

7.

It was noon, with the sun directly over them, pinning their shadows under them as they started down the steps of the Hotel Esposa. Behind them, the birds fluted in their bamboo cages, and water ran in a little fountain bath. They were as neat as they could get, their faces and hands washed, their nails cleansed, their shoes polished.

Across the plaza two hundred yards away stood a small group of men, in the shade of a store front overhang. Some of the men were natives from the jungle area, with machetes gleaming at their sides. They were all facing the plaza.

Standing on the bottom step Webb lit a cigarette.

"Do you remember the fashion magazines — *World Bazaar*, *Town Woman?*" he said. "How they used to travel to Rome, Havana, Mexico City? And pose their cold-cream-faced models in front of famous buildings, the Parthenon, the Acropolis, or in front of 'quaint' native

boys in fisher boats, or at the mouth of 'cute' alleys they never had to live in? Remember?"

The buildings always out of focus, he thought. The natives always out of focus. The emphasis always on the model and what she wore, the cut, the fit, the buttons, the flare, the dolman sleeves, the bat wing.

"I often wondered," he said aloud, "how the natives felt, how the quaint alleys felt, how the Acropolis and the Parthenon felt. Well, I had a daydream awhile back. The dream was this: we were home in California, sitting on our front porch, when a car drove up. A Haitian photographer leaped out, with his camera, followed by two dark-skinned models. 'This is wonderful,' he cried. 'Wonderful! You!' he said to me, 'stand over here, will you? and water the lawn as Americans do. So quaint! That's it. And you, there,' he nodded to you, Leonora, 'you bend and pick flowers. Hold it!' And he posed his models, his dark-skinned girls in front of us, and clocked pictures all afternoon using us as a *quaint* background."

"That was your dream?"

"That was it. And I woke up, suddenly knowing how the Acropolis felt all these years being 'used' by the culture snobs. And how some Patzcuaro fisherman felt when asked to be a 'motion-picture set' for some forty-dollar-an-hour mannequin. It wasn't nice. I woke up mad, mad at myself and anyone I'd ever known up north, who'd done a thing like that."

He finished the cigarette and tossed it down, stepped on it, kicked the flattened butt into the street.

"Here we go!"

They moved down the steps and started around the far side of the plaza, past the few shops that were still open. They walked quietly.

"Perhaps they'll be decent to us."

"We can hope so."

They passed a photographic shop.

"It's another day. Anything can happen. I believe that. No — I don't really believe it. I'm only talking. I've got to talk or I wouldn't be able to walk," she said.

They passed a candy shop.

"Keep talking, then."

"I'm afraid," she said. "This can't be happening to us. Are we the last ones in the world?"

"Maybe next to the last."

They approached an open air *carneceria*.

God! he thought. *How the horizons narrowed, how they came in. A year ago there weren't four directions we could go — there were a million for us. Yesterday they got down to four; we could go to Juatala, Porto Bello, San Juan Clementas, or Brioconbria. We were satisfied to have our car. Then when we couldn't get gas, we were satisfied to have our clothes; then when they took our clothes, we were satisfied to have a place to sleep. Each pleasure they took away left us with one other creature comfort to hold onto. Did you see how we let go of one thing and clutched another so quickly? I guess that's human. So they took away everything. There's nothing left. Except*

us. It all boils down to just you and me walking along here, and thinking too goddam much for my own good. And what counts in the end is whether they can take you away from me or me away from you, Lee, and I don't think they can do that. They've got everything else and I don't blame them. But they can't really do anything else to us now. When you strip all the clothes away and the doodads, you have two human beings who were either happy or unhappy, and we have no complaints.

"Walk slowly," said John Webb.

"I am."

"Not too slowly to look reluctant. Not too fast, to look as if you want to get it over with. Don't give them the satisfaction, Lee, don't give them a damn bit."

"I won't."

They walked. "Don't even touch me," he said, quietly. "Don't even hold my hand."

"Oh, please!"

"No, not even that." He moved away a few inches and kept walking steadily. His eyes were straight ahead and their pace was regular.

"I'm beginning to cry, Johnny."

"Goddam it!" he said, measuredly, between his teeth, not looking aside. "Stop it! Do you want me to run, — is that what you want — do you want me to take you and run into the jungle and let them hunt us, is that what you want, goddam it, do you want me to fall down in the street here and grovel and scream? Let's do this right. Don't give them *any*thing!" They walked on.

"All right," she said, hands tight, her head coming up. "I'm not crying now. I won't cry."

"Good, dammit, that's good."

And still, strangely, they were not past the *carneceria*. The vision of red horror, the outdoor butcher shop, was on their left as they paced steadily forward on the hot tile sidewalk. The things that hung from hooks looked like brutalities and sins, like bad consciences, evil dreams, like gored flags and slaughtered promises.

As he passed the shop, something made John Webb strike out a hand. He slapped it smartly against a strung-up side of beef. A mantle of blue buzzing flies lifted angrily and swirled in a bright cone over the meat.

Leonora said, looking ahead, walking: "They're all strangers! I don't know any of them. I wish I knew even *one* of them. I wish even *one* of them knew me!"

They walked on past the *carneceria*. The side of beef, red and irritable-looking, swung in the hot sunlight after they passed. The flies came down in a feeding cloak to cover the meat, once it had stopped swinging.

And as they walked, and reached the far end of the plaza, the men waiting there moved eagerly toward them.

CRIME CAVALCADE

BY VINCENT H. GADDIS

Thespian Thievery

Expert dramatic ability is not a common talent. That's why police in Falls City, Neb., unsuccessfully checked for road shows in the vicinity after they received a report from Bob Alton. Alton, a clerk in a grocery store, said a stranger walked in one day recently and asked him to cash a check drawn on a local bank. When Alton hesitated, the man insisted that he call the bank.

But the bank reported that they had no account registered in the stranger's name.

Expressing astonishment, the man said he had deposited $1000 in the bank a few days before and showed Alton the deposit slip. He then called the bank, said there had been a serious mistake, and made an appointment to straighten the matter out. Alton then cashed a check for $5.

Next day it came back marked "No Account."

A week later the stranger again entered the store, said he liked Alton, picked up the bum check and gave him a 25¢ tip. It later developed that he had paid Alton by cashing another worthless check somewhere else.

Geiger Counter Trap

According to Wilbur Steinmann, professor of electrical engineering at the University of Vermont, a clever farmer has come up with a lie detector for thieving hens. This farmer, who raises chickens in Minnesota, couldn't discover which of his hens was eating eggs in the nest. Taking a dozen eggs to the University of Minnesota, he had them bombarded with neutrons, then placed the eggs in the nests.

After they disappeared he marched the hens, one at a time, past a Geiger counter. When the culprit appeared the counter buzzed.

Always Room for More

In Dallas, Tex., a department store floorwalker noticed a middle-aged woman shoplifter slip two items under her dress. He called police who placed the woman under arrest as she left the store. When she was searched at the city jail, officers found a raincoat, a sack of candy, a man's shirt, two billfolds, five pairs of nylons, three packages of buckshot, two flower bulbs, two pints of paint, a jar of deodorant, a tube of toothpaste, four packages of flower seeds, and two brassieres.

Delayed Action

Twenty-four years ago a thief in Cleveland, Ohio, took $4 in a rob-

bery and left fingerprints on a glass jar. Last April police announced the arrest of James M. Dunn, 49, in connection with the theft. They said fingerprints Dunn made recently on his cab driver application matched those that had been filed by detectives almost a quarter of a century ago.

Repeat Visit

Burglars who stole four chairs from Pete Mazzanti's Cafe in Rossville, Calif., were apparently pleased with their loot. A week later they broke in again to take a matching table.

Holdup Hokum

Mrs. Fannie Beall, a clerk in an East Baltimore, Md., grocery, was a little nervous when a would-be bandit pointed a gun at her. So was the bandit. In fact he shook so violently that his single-action gun came apart in his hand and the lone bullet fell to the floor. As the bandit got down on his hands and knees to retrieve his bullet, Mrs. Beall seized a butcher knife from a nearby meat counter. The bandit fled, leaving the money, his bullet, and part of the gun behind.

Prophetic Sermon

The Rev. Erwin Gaede, pastor of the First Unitarian Church in South Bend, Ind., announced that his sermon on the following Sunday would be on the topic: "Who Was the Criminal?"

Four days later he saw no reason to change his mind after a thief broke into his study adjoining the church and escaped with $48 in cash and checks. "I only wish," said the minister, "that the burglar had taken the book on my desk instead of the money. In fact if he brings the money back, I'll give him the book. It's called 'My Six Convicts.'"

Delaware Deviltry

Witches can ride their brooms again in Delaware without the maximum penalty of $100 fine or a year's imprisonment. The state assembly at Dover this spring voted to abolish a Colonial law which prohibited conjuration, fortune telling, and dealing with evil spirits. It was one of several obsolete statutes that could not be stricken from the books without approval of the assembly.

Deathhouse Debate

An argument over who should be the executioner saved the life of a condemned man in the Florida state penitentiary at Raiford in 1926. After Jim Williams, a Negro, had been strapped in the electric chair, both the warden and the sheriff refused to pull the switch. Each insisted the other was the official executioner. After a heated argument that lasted almost half an hour, Williams was returned to his cell. His ordeal resulted in his sentence being commuted to life imprisonment. Eight years later he was given a full pardon for saving two lives on a prison farm.

The Molested

The train was too crowded to let her escape from the hands touching her. And then she didn't want to escape . . .

BY

HUNT COLLINS

She was shoved into the subway car at Grand Central.

It was July, and the passengers reeked of sweat and after-office beers. She wore a loose silk dress, buttoned high on the throat, and she wished for a moment that she had worn something lower cut. The overhead fans in the cars were going, but the air hung over the packed passengers like a damp, clinging blanket.

She was packed in tightly, with a stout woman standing next to her on her right, a tall thin man on her left, and a pair of broad shoulders in front of her, a tall girl and a little squat man behind her. The fat woman was wearing cheap perfume, and the aroma assailed her nostrils, caused her senses to revolt. The thin man on her left held a thinly folded copy of the *New York Times*. He sported a black mustache under his curving nose. The nose was buried in the newspaper, and she glanced at the paper and then took her eyes away from the headlines.

There was a slight movement behind her and she leaned forward. The broad shoulders in front of her shoved back indignantly. Whoever was behind her moved again, and she felt a kneecap pressing into the backs of her own knees.

She moved again, away from the pressure of the knee, and then she tried to look over her shoulder, turning slightly to her left. Her elbow brushed the *Times*, and the thin man lifted the paper gingerly, shook it as if it were crawling with ants, and then went back to his reading.

The kneecap was suddenly removed.

She thought: *No, I didn't mean you should . . .*

She was suddenly aware of something warm touching the back of her leg. She almost leaped forward because the touch had surprised her with its abruptness. The silk dress was thin, and she wore no girdle. She felt the warmth spread until it formed the firm outline of fingers touching her flesh.

A tremor of excitement traveled the length of her body, spreading from the warmth on her leg. She moved again, and the stout woman shot her an angry glance, but the hand was taken from her leg.

The excitement in her ebbed.

She stood stock-still, wondering when it would start again. She almost didn't breathe.

It looked as if there would be no more. She moved her leg impatiently, but the excitement that had flared within her was dead, and now she felt only the oppressive heat of the train. The car jogged along, and she cursed her foolishness in trying the subway to begin with. She thought of the thousands of girls who rode home every night, and then the heat overwhelmed her again, and she was sorry for herself once more.

The train rounded a curve, and she lost her balance. She lurched backward, felt the smooth, gentle hands close on her, then release her instantly as she righted herself.

The train pulled into 86th Street, and the door slid open. She was pushed onto the platform, and shoved past the man and woman who had been standing behind her in the train. The man was short and squat, and he wore a battered Panama. His hands were thin, with long fingers that clung innocently to the lapels of his suit. She looked at the tall girl, and the girl's eyes met hers sympathetically. She smiled quickly, darting her eyes away, and the girl smiled. The debarking passengers rushed by her, and suddenly everyone on the platform was scrambling to get into the car again. She stepped in quickly, moving deliberately in front of the tall girl, and away from the man. He pushed into the car behind her, and she felt the girl shoved rudely against her, too. She heard the door close behind them, and she sucked in a deep breath as the heat descended again.

She knew what was going to happen, and she waited expectantly. The excitement was mounting in her again, and she found herself wishing desperately for the warmth. When it came she almost sighed aloud. The hands were gentle, as before, as she knew they had to be. They

touched her, and then held tight. She shivered and the hands moved slowly, deliberately. For a moment there was sudden doubt in her mind, and then she put the doubt aside and thought only of the moving hands, the deliberate pressure of the hands . . .

They became more insistent, strangely so, strongly so. A perplexed frown creased her brow, and the doubt returned, and she was almost tempted to turn and look. But that was absurd . . . that was . . .

The hands continued, moving feverishly, and suddenly she realized there was wild strength in the fingers. She looked down in panic. This wasn't . . . couldn't be . . .

The hand was covered with hair. Long, slender fingers, with thick masculine hair . . .

"I thought . . ." she murmured, and then she began screaming.

When the train pulled into 125th Street, she was still screaming. The tall girl who had also stood behind her went on her way with the other passengers, all shaking their heads.

The policeman held the short, squat man firmly while she screamed, "He was molesting me! a man. A *man!*" And then, because the policeman looked at her strangely, she added, "This man, officer."

Malone only had two juvenile delinquents and some lady wrestlers on his hands—until he ran into the wandering corpse.

Life Can be Horrible

A John J. Malone story

BY CRAIG RICE

"Look here, Malone," Maggie said, "just because you lost all your money on that all-night poker game, it doesn't mean you have to take your bad temper out on me. You've got to see these two clients, now."

"Go away," the little lawyer said. "Today I wouldn't see the Emperor of Little America. And I didn't lose all my money. I've got eight dollars and seventy cents. I know, I just counted it. Chase the clients away: I'm busy worrying."

"What are you worrying about?"

John J. Malone said, "Can't I just worry, without worrying about anything in particular?"

"Malone," Maggie said, "you've got to see these two people."

He reached for a cigar, looked up at her. Maggie could usually spot a prospective client with money three blocks away on a clear afternoon.

"I don't think they have a dollar between them," Maggie said. "But

I think you'd better see them." She added, "Their name is DiAngelo."

Malone bounded up from behind his desk. "For the love of Pat and Mike, why didn't you say so? What are you standing there for? Send them in."

The two young men Maggie ushered into the office definitely didn't look like profitable clients. They looked very much alike. Blue jeans, windbreakers. He got a few facts fast as they sat down on the couch. The one on the left was Eddie DiAngelo, age twenty. The one on the right was Frankie DiAngelo, age nineteen. They both looked scared.

Malone wondered if he ought to offer them a glass of wine. He did. They accepted it and said, "Thanks," in unison.

"Mr. Malone," Eddie said, "our Uncle Joe said you were the best lawyer in Chicago, maybe in the whole world. He said we should come to you."

Malone lit his cigar and said, "Your uncle Joe is a very smart man." Joe the Angel, owner and proprietor of Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar. Friend, and occasional banker, to Malone. The least he could do for Joe the Angel's nephews was to take the case for free. After all, eight dollars and seventy cents was a good stake for another poker game.

"We want you to defend us," Eddie said.

"Speeding ticket?" Malone asked genially.

Eddie shook his smooth-haired head. "Uncle Joe explained to us what the charges would be. Breaking and entering. Attempted robbery."

The quiet-looking Frankie roused himself and added, "And murder."

Malone held his breath for a good sixty seconds, put his cigar down in the ashtray and said, "Maybe you'd better tell me the whole story."

"Well," Eddie said, "it's like this. Yesterday this babe —"

"*Lady*," Frankie said.

"All right, this *lady* came into Uncle Joe's. She had a coupla drinks, and she asked Uncle Joe, does he know where she can hire a coupla husky young guys to do some moving for her. So Uncle Joe, he knows we can use some money, so he tells this babe — pardon me, I mean *lady* — yes, and he calls us up, and we come and talk to her in Uncle Joe's back room."

He paused, fumbled through his pockets, and fished out a cigarette that had been lit once before, carefully put out, and saved to be lit again. Malone rose to the rescue with the box on his desk.

"Thanks, Malone. Uncle Joe said we was to call you that, not *Mister* Malone. Anyway, we meet her. She's a big babe —"

"*Lady*," Frankie said gloomily.

"She's a big lady, and very pretty. She tells us this story. She's got a husband, they're separated. He is hanging onto the house, which is out in Maywood. He is also hanging onto ten thousand dollars in thou-

sand-dollar bills, which rightfully belong to her. She gives us the address, and draws the layout of the house on a paper napkin. Here's a window, on the side. The house is hid all around with bushes and stuff. She said, cut the screen on this window, it goes into the bedroom. You get there early, he'll be asleep. But just to be safe, make sure he stays asleep."

"Sap him, she said," Frankie said.

"Well, just to keep him quiet while we search the house. Because the money's supposed to be in a tin box in the book case. If it ain't there, he may have hid it, and we better look. We better do this very early in the morning. So, we say yes. I borrow a car, we drive out. It's a funny little house, a lot of trees and stuff around it. The guy paints pictures, or something."

"Artist," Frankie said.

"Well, we go in. Through the window. The bedroom is empty. That worries me a little. I had a sap with me, just in case. You know I mean. We went in through the bedroom, we walk into a big room, living room. I guess. All filled up with pictures. The guy is there, on the floor. Somebody else has hit him with a sap, too hard, I guess, and he's dead."

"What did you do?" Malone demanded.

"Do? What the babe — I mean, lady — told us to do. We looked for the money. It wasn't there. We searched that whole place and didn't find a dime. We even searched *him*. Then we got worried and we talked to Uncle Joe, and he said come talk to you, and here we are. Can we be arrested?"

"Not if I can prevent it," Malone said. He pushed the buzzer and yelled. "Maggie! Get me Joe the Angel."

Joe's voice came over the phone sounding a little wistful. "Malone, can you —"

"Yes, I can," Malone said, "but can you get these two amateur criminals out of town so they won't get in my way while I'm doing my job?"

There was a little silence on the far end of the line. Then Joe the Angel said, "My cousin in Milwaukee. They can stay there a few days. They can take the North-Shore Electric. You send them over here, I make all the arrangements, give them money. And you, Malone, you *work*." He hung up.

"All right, boys," Malone said. "You're going to take a short vacation. Stop over at Uncle Joe's. He has your tickets and money, and I don't want to see you or hear from you until everything is all clear. Catch?"

"Catch," Eddie and Frankie said in unison. They waved goodbye, and ducked.

Malone folded his arms on his desk, rested his head on them, and wished he had died in his cradle.

Maggie came in, snapped, "Malone!" looked at him, then walked around the desk, laid a gentle hand

on his shoulder and said softly, "Malone!"

He looked up wearily. "I've decided to abandon the profession of law. I've decided to become a radio announcer. How do you like this?"

The little lawyer stood up, squared off, and went on in pear-shaped tones:

"Life — can be horrible. This program comes to you through the courtesy of the Spit 'n Image Undertaking Parlors, whose thought for today is: you, too, may try our easy lay-away plan." He looked at Maggie. "Not good, not bad?"

"Worse," Maggie said. "This may cheer you a little." She handed him an envelope.

Malone ripped it open. Two hundred-dollar bills fell out, and a note.

The note read:

"Retainer on my nephews' case. Your respectful friend, Joe the Angel."

Malone grabbed the phone, dialed Joe the Angel's number.

"Look here," he said, "I can't take money from you."

"Since when?" Joe the Angel said, and hung up.

Malone sighed, tucked the money in his wallet, and told Maggie, "Now, I've *got* to produce."

"Go back to worrying," she said, and went out.

Malone put his head back on his arms and worried about how he'd lost that much in last night's poker game, what he was going to do about the young DiAngelos, and where next month's office rent was coming from. He was awakened from a dream of utter darkness by a discreet knock at the door.

"Malone," Maggie whispered. "Another client, and it looks important, and for the love of heaven, comb your hair and straighten your tie."

The little lawyer roused himself, scooted to the cupboard washbasin, and did the best he could. He was sitting behind his desk when Maggie ushered the woman in.

She was a king-sized Amazon, and beautiful. Malone stood up from behind his desk, and estimated her height at a little less than the Empire State Building. He took a second look and decided she was only about five foot eleven. Her hair was blonde, her face was lovely. Her clothes were definitely not from a department store basement.

"Mr. Malone," she said, "I'm Nadine Sapphire."

"A beautiful name," the little lawyer said gallantly, "for a beautiful woman."

She smiled, sat down, and became only half the size of the Empire State Building.

"I wish my husband had as beautiful a one," she said. "His name is Jackson Kornblum. He's an artist. I mean, he paints pictures, I suppose that makes him an artist. And he has ten thousand dollars that belong to me." Malone felt a quickening down his spine. What had Eddie said? "*A big lady, and very pretty.*"

"Go on, my dear," he said, and hoped his voice didn't sound as hoarse as it felt.

"We'd quarrelled. We'd been quarreling a lot, but this was the finish. I'd brought the money home, in cash, that afternoon, and put it in a tin box on the bookcase, to take to the bank the next day. He wouldn't let me touch it. He put me out of the house."

Malone took another look at his client and decided Jackson Kornblum must be about the size and shape of Samson. He looked sympathetic. "You poor girl."

"That was day before yesterday," she said. "He won't send me the money, and I don't want to go out there alone. That's why I came to you. I suppose I could take a policeman with me, but I think a lawyer would be better. After all, it's my money. I earned it."

"None of my business," Malone said, "but how?"

She looked as though he should have known. "I'm a lady wrestler."

Malone managed, with an almost superhuman effort, not to look surprised.

"Well, will you come with me?"

He rose and said, "What are we waiting for?"

Her car was waiting downstairs, and she drove it expertly. The little lawyer had a feeling she would do everything just as expertly.

The house was just as the young DiAngelos had described it, a small house, surrounded by trees and bushes, in that section where the city was about to become suburb. It was, Malone noted, still within the city limits. That meant the murder was in von Flanagan's jurisdiction, which was good. Von Flanagan occasionally gave him a bad time, but suburban police were worse.

They walked up to the front door and she fumbled for her keys. Well, Malone told himself, this was as good a way as any to discover the body.

They went in. There wasn't any body to discover. Malone blinked.

There wasn't even an indication that a body had ever been there.

Maybe the DiAngelos had been mistaken. Maybe Jackson Kornblum had just been conked on the head hard enough to knock him cold, had come to, and walked away. But Malone didn't think so. Young as they were, the DiAngelos would have been able to tell if a man were dead or not.

"He isn't in," Nadine Sapphire said in a tone of relief.

She looked through the house while Malone looked around the room. A big room, full of pictures. A hardly adequate description. The pictures made him shudder a little, even if he couldn't tell what they were supposed to represent. He imagined Jackson Kornblum had painted them. Certainly he wouldn't have *bought* them. No one in his right mind would have bought them.

"No, he isn't here," she said, coming back in the room.

She walked over to the bookcase, picked up the tin box and opened it.

"But the money is," she said happily. She counted it. "It's all here. Ten thousand-dollar bills."

Malone's mind was whirling like a merry-go-round. The DiAngelos had been telling the truth. The body had been here and the money gone. Now the body was gone, and the money was here.

Were the DiAngelos crazy, or was he?

His gaze caught a framed photograph on the bookcase, a thin-faced man with small eyes, set close together, and a small beard.

"Is this him?" he asked.

Nadine Sapphire nodded. "That's him. The rat." She stuffed the money in her purse. "Let's be on our way."

Halfway to the Loop she said, "You've been very kind. I suppose your fee should be ten percent."

"Miss Sapphire," Malone said. "You've taken up a very little of my time, on a morning when I had nothing to do anyway. I've had a very pleasant drive on a beautiful day. Let's see — my fee has been paid."

She shot a sharp glance at him.

"The pleasure," he said, "of meeting a real lady wrestler. First time in my life."

She laughed. "All right. Then let me send you tickets to the match tonight."

"A deal," Malone said.

Back in his office, he worried about the whole thing. Finally he called up Joe the Angel. The boys should be at their destination by now. He got the telephone number in Milwaukee and put a call through, and got Eddie on the wire.

Were they absolutely sure the man was dead? Were they absolutely sure the money was gone?

Eddie's voice was hurt. "Mr. Malone, don't you believe us? Naturally we're sure."

"Just wanted to double-check," the little lawyer said soothingly.

"Is anything wrong?" Eddie asked anxiously.

"Not as far as you're concerned," Malone reassured him. He hung up.

Well, one hopeful theory was out. That Kornblum had hidden the money in a safer place. That someone had knocked him cold enough to make him look dead. That he'd come to, put the money back in the box, and gone out.

Everything would have been so easy if it had happened that way. The DiAngelos could have come back from Milwaukee, Nadine Sapphire would have her money and all he, Malone, would have had to do was forget the whole thing and go to the wrestling matches.

But it hadn't worked out that way.

The phone rang and he picked it up with an inexplicable sense of apprehension.

"Malone? Rico DiAngelo. I want you to come over right away. I got a trouble."

Another DiAngelo. Where did

Rico, Joe's cousin, the one who owned the undertaking parlor on North Avenue, fit into this tangle?

Malone said, "I'll be right over."

He paused in the outer office and said, "If any more DiAngelos get into this rat race, I'm going to Alaska."

He took a cab to the ornate establishment and walked in. Rico was waiting for him, his usually cheerful face pale with anxiety.

"Malone," he said without preliminary, "I got a body. A corpse."

"Well," the lawyer said with false cheerfulness, "I thought that was your business."

"You don't understand," Rico said. "I don't know how I got this body."

"You're damned right I don't understand," Malone said. He took out a cigar, started to unwrap it, and put it back in his pocket.

"Somebody, they break in my place last night," Rico said. "I see it when I get here. I think, I been robbed. I don't worry. No money here to steal. I look around and I find it. The body."

He looked at Malone with a kind of helpless anguish. "Nothing stolen. Nothing missing. But somebody leave me a body."

"Whose?" Malone asked savagely.

Rico shrugged his shoulders. "No clothes. No wallet. Nothing. Just a body. On the slab, covered with one of my sheets. What are we to do?"

"First," Malone said, "we'll take a look at this body."

He had a horrible premonition that was turning his stomach into what felt like an ice-cube tray.

Rico led him into the back room, where a sheeted form lay on the slab. "There it is," Rico said. He pulled back the sheet.

The premonition had been right. A thin face, eyes too close together, a soft little brown beard.

"Whose was it, Malone?" Rico whispered. "Where did it come from and how did it get here?" He sighed noisily. "I run a nice little business here, I never get in no trouble. Malone, what do I do now?"

Malone was silent for a moment. Again he reached for the cigar, again he put it back.

"I know whose body it is, and I know where it came from. I don't know how it got here, but I know what we're going to do. We're going to break out your hearse and we're going to put it back where it came from."

"Malone," Rico said, "you are my friend. Any time you want flowers free, to give to one of your girls —"

"Forget it," Malone said. He went back into the front room. He saw that there was an ashtray, unobtrusive, but nevertheless an ashtray, and decided it was not against etiquette to light the cigar. He could hear Rico talking in rapid Italian to his assistant, he could hear sounds of movement.

At last Rico came to the door and said, "All packed. Let's go."

Malone followed him out to the

alley and slid into the front seat of the ambulance.

"I think this better than the hearse," Rico said. "Not so much noticed." He stepped on the gas. "George, he is in back with the patient." He grinned.

Malone gave him the address and said, "Let's not use the siren. Also because we'll be not so much noticed."

He tried to think things out. Anyway he looked at it, it added up to one of those mathematical problems that could only be solved by a wall-wide electric machine with two thousand push buttons.

Jackson Kornblum had been a smallish man. (Malone suddenly remembered Nadine Sapphire saying, "He put me out of the house." The little lawyer wondered just how he'd done it.) But even so, it would have taken a fairly strong person to carry him out of the house, probably into a car, and then carry him into Rico DiAngelo's undertaking parlor. A reasonably husky man could have done it. Or a lady wrestler.

But she'd seemed genuinely surprised when the body was missing.

Had she killed him? She had the strength to crack a man's skull, which was what had happened to Kornblum. Had she killed him, and arranged an elaborate shenanigan with him to go out to the house, so that she would have a witness — a lawyer — present when the body was discovered?

Had it happened that way, and had someone else moved him to Rico's? Why? And who had put the money back in the tin box, and where had it been in the meantime?

And where were Jackson Kornblum's clothes? Had they been taken off to avoid identification? But in that case, why bother to break into an undertaking parlor and leave the body there? Why not just dump it in a ditch somewhere?

Finally, why had Kornblum been killed? Malone sighed loudly.

Rico said anxiously, "I go too fast for you, yes?"

"You don't go too fast for me, no," Malone said.

Fortunately, the Kornblum house was in a sparsely settled section. No one seemed to notice the ambulance as it pulled up through the trees and stopped by the front door. Malone got out and tried to remember how the young DiAngelos had broken in. The bedroom window. He walked around the house, found the window with the cut screen, and crawled in. The pictures leered at him as he walked through the living room; he tried to avoid looking at them.

He opened the front door. Rico and his assistant carried in the late Mr. Kornblum.

"Here," Malone said. "On the floor."

Rico frowned and looked a little shocked. "Not on the bed?"

Malone shook his head. "The floor."

Rico shrugged his shoulders and obeyed.

"We're taking the sheet back with us," the lawyer said.

Rico picked up the sheet, folded it. "He doesn't have no clothes on."

"He's not going to get cold," Malone said grimly. "Let's get out of here before somebody drives by and wonders what an ambulance is doing parked in the front yard."

As they neared downtown, Rico said, "I drive you to your office."

"Not in this you won't," Malone said hastily. "I too have my social standing. Just drop me where I can get a taxi. And forget all this ever happened."

Rico sighed. "Maybe I lose a good customer."

"Maybe we'll get him back for you," Malone told him.

The tickets were in an envelope on his desk when he reached the office. He looked at them thoughtfully. An idea, not much of a one, but something, was beginning to form in his mind. He picked up the phone and called the Milwaukee number.

"Eddie," he said, "it's okay to come back. And come back right away. I think you can give me some help."

He hung up and called Maggie in.

"Get two more of these," he said, waving the tickets at her. "I'm treating some young friends to the matches tonight. And then —" He fished for the paper on which he'd written the address of the Kornblum house, found it, and handed it to her. "Find out what precinct this is in. Call that precinct, report a body at this address, and hang up fast. Then get hold of Charlie Stein for me and tell him to get over here, also fast." He wasn't sure if he was accomplishing anything, but at least he wasn't losing ground.

It was less than half an hour before Charlie Stein arrived. He was a dapper little man with a waxed moustache, who was a one-man Dun and Bradstreet — except that he worked faster. For the most part his customers were bookies and proprietors of gambling houses, who wanted to know how far their clients' credit could be trusted. Malone never had figured how he could get his information, but he could ferret out the finest details, and, when necessary, in a hurry.

"H'ya, boy," he greeted Malone. "Got a drink in the house?"

Malone opened the filing drawer marked "Emergency" and pulled out the bottle of gin and two glasses.

Charlie toasted him silently, then said, "What can I do for you, boy?"

"Find out everything about a guy named Jackson Kornblum. Bank accounts, insurance, the works."

"Can do," Charlie said. "How soon?"

"I'd like it in ten minutes," Malone said, "but — well, as fast as you can make it."

"Fast it is," Charlie said. He tossed off the rest of the gin. "See you this afternoon." He flicked an imaginary speck of dust from the carnation in his lapel.

Malone slipped him one of the two hundred-dollar bills he'd received from Joe the Angel.

"Thank you, boy," he said, and was off.

An idea was beginning to form slowly in Malone's mind. So far it hadn't taken any definite shape nor form — it was like jello that still had to be poured in the mold — but it was there.

He picked up the phone and called von Flanagan, at Homicide.

Von Flanagan wasn't in. Malone identified himself, swore it was a matter of vital importance, and asked where he could reach the Captain. After a few minutes' wait he was given an address he immediately recognized as that of the Kornblum house.

Well, there was nothing to do until Charlie Stein came back, and a little refreshment and human companionship might help the idea to jell.

He paused in the outer office. Maggie said, "The tickets arrived by messenger. And since when have you taken up wrestling?"

"Not wrestling," the little lawyer told her, "wrestlers. There's a distinction. I'm going out on business, and I'll be back in an hour."

She sniffed. "If anything important comes up, I'll call you at Joe the Angel's."

It was not the first, nor even the hundredth time that Malone had sought Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar as a refuge from troubles and a place to compose his thoughts. He slid onto a stool at the far end of the bar, waved at Joe, and said, "Rye."

Joe slid it in front of him, and as Malone reached for his wallet, held up a protesting hand.

"Today, on the house."

"Thanks," Malone said. He downed his drink, reached for his beer chaser. "I phoned the boys that they can come back from Milwaukee."

"They're all okay?" Joe the Angel said happily, refilling the glass.

"All okay," Malone told him.

For an anxious moment he thought Joe the Angel was going to kiss him, in front of a janitor from City Hall, a *Tribune* reporter, and assorted patrons. He protected himself by getting the second drink down fast. His glass had hardly touched the bar before Joe the Angel filled it again.

"You know what happen, Malone?"

"Not quite," Malone said, "but I will." He hoped he was telling the truth. "I just know they'll be in the clear."

Joe the Angel turned to the City Hall janitor and said, "This Malone, he's smart like a judge."

"This gal who hired the boys," Malone said casually. "You ever see her before?"

Joe nodded. "She come in now and then, have one small drink wine, say goodnight, go out again."

"Any idea who she is?"

Joe shook his head. "Me, I don't ask my customers their names. I know now who she is, I think. The

boys tell me when they come in this morning, she married to that fella got killed. I don't know his name, I don't know her name."

His tone indicated that he would just as soon not know, that he was through with the whole matter. He shoved the bottle of rye in front of Malone, said, "Help yourself," and went away to wait on a new customer.

Malone sat brooding. The idea was beginning to jell a little, but not much.

He'd been thinking that sending the two young DiAngelos out to the Kornblum house on what turned out to be a fool's errand had been intended as a coverup for murder. He decided now that didn't make sense. If the plan had been to have the DiAngelos caught with the corpse, there would have been some arrangement to catch them. This way, no one could prove they had ever been near the place.

No, there had to be some other reason. The boys had been sent on a genuine errand. But someone else had gotten there ahead of them, and done exactly what they had been supposed to do — except that they were only supposed to knock Jackson Kornblum cold, and the someone else had struck with intent to kill.

Had it just happened that way?

No, that would be asking the long arm of coincidence to bend its elbow a little too much.

There was still the matter of the late Mr. Kornblum's unexpected appearance in Rico DiAngelo's Undertaking Parlor, and the reappearance of the ten thousand dollars.

"I'll think of something," the little lawyer said out loud.

"You always think of something, Malone," Joe the Angel said admiringly.

"Let's hope this doesn't prove to be the exception that proves the rule," Malone said. He looked at his watch. Time for Charlie Stein to be getting back. He took a fourth drink, waved goodbye to Joe the Angel, and headed back to the office.

It wasn't long before Charlie Stein arrived.

"Easy job, boy, easy job. I ought to give you half your money back."

Malone grinned. "That would be the day! What's the answer or answers?"

"This guy Kornblum, he acts poor and he lives poor. Well, not poor exactly, boy, but not rich. He thinks he's an artist; he's — he's —"

"Eccentric?" Malone said.

"That's the word, boy. He owns his house. He also owns about half a million bucks worth of stocks and bonds. But he keeps it a secret, and he makes his wife go out and earn her own living and most of his. Anything else you want to know?"

Malone shook his head. "You're a genius at finding out stuff, Charlie."

Charlie Stein smiled modestly. "I have my sources. See you, boy."

Malone thought for a moment, picked up the phone and called von

Flanagan again. This time the police officer was in his office.

"Malone," he roared over the phone, "I got your message but I've been busy. Funny murder case. Tell you about it sometime."

"Do that," Malone said pleasantly.

"Says it's a matter of vital importance. What's up, Malone?"

"I've got two tickets to the wrestling matches tonight," Malone said, "and I wanted to invite you to go with me."

There was a moment's silence, then a burst of profanity from von Flanagan shook the receiver.

"Vital importance! Wrestling matches! And I'm a busy man!" There was another silence, and then, in a milder tone, "That's very nice of you, Malone. I think I can make it. When and where?"

"Meet you at Joe the Angel's at seven-thirty," Malone said. "I've never seen lady wrestlers in action, and I think I'll need to build up my strength."

The idea still hadn't jelled.

It was still formless when the two young DiAngelos came in. They looked considerably more cheerful than when he had seen them last.

"You find out who killed him, Mr. Malone?" Eddie asked excitedly.

"Not yet," Malone said, with confidence he hoped wasn't false. "But you don't need to worry. No one saw you go there. No one saw you there. No one saw you leave. So just relax, and don't do it again."

They grinned at him silently.

He picked up the tickets Maggie had gotten for him and handed them over. "I'd like you to come and watch the matches tonight."

"Gee!" Frankie said.

"That's swell!" Eddie said.

They said, "Thanks!" in unison.

Malone said, very casually. "I'd like to have a word with you outside after it's over. Oh now, don't look worried. There's no trouble involved. You just may be able to do me a favor, that's all."

"Gee, sure," Frankie said.

"Any time, Mr. Malone," Eddie said.

They grinned at him again from the door by way of goodbye.

Two drinks past seven-thirty, von Flanagan began to get confidential about his day's work.

"Everybody goes out of his way to make things hard for me," the big red-faced police officer said. It was a familiar complaint, but Malone listened. "A nice, clean, straight killing I can understand. But something like this, it just makes a lot of unnecessary work for the police department."

He went on to tell about the nude body of a murdered artist found in a secluded house, on a tip given from some unknown source.

Malone silently thanked the Unknown Source, and wished he could raise her salary. That reminded him of an unpleasant fact: in a feeling of warm goodwill he'd paid up half the office rent, paid Maggie part of her

salary, and from his remaining one hundred dollars, had only a little over eleven left. Maybe Joe the Angel — no, this was not the time.

Von Flanagan was still going into details, and Malone paid polite attention, reflecting that he was still two steps ahead of the Homicide Captain.

The Captain finished his third drink and said, "Can't figure out what happened to his clothes. Let's go, Malone. Always wanted to see a lady wrestler."

On their way, Malone wondered about sending flowers to her — he supposed they would call it "dressing room". There was a florist where he still had credit. What kind of flowers? Tiger lilies might be appropriate. Or may be it wasn't etiquette to send flowers to a lady wrestler. He decided against it.

When she appeared in the ring, she seemed even bigger and prettier than she had in his office. She wore what looked to him like a tight-fitting bathing suit, in a restrained shade of red. Her blonde hair was pinned around her head in braids.

The crowd cheered for, "*Nadine!*"

Her opponent stepped into the ring. She was just as big, and just as pretty, but her suit was a bright green, and her hair was just a bit on the reddish side.

The crowd sent up a cheer for, "*Daphne!*"

It was, Malone had to admit, a performance. He was not a ballet fan himself, preferring a good chorus line, but under duress he had attended a few. This was as close to ballet as he had ever seen. A combination of ballet and sheer mayhem. He watched, fascinated.

Once or twice he heard von Flanagan murmur a discreet, "Wow!"

Malone pulled his notebook from his pocket, scribbled a quick note: "Will you have supper with me? Malone." He grabbed an usher, handed him the note and a dollar bill. That brought the bankroll down to ten.

When it was over, and Nadine had been pronounced the winner, he led a dazed-eyed von Flanagan down to the street. He stood there for a moment in the milling crowds, looking around. At last he spotted the two of them.

"Wait here," he told von Flanagan, and shoved through the crowd to the two young DiAngelos.

"That's her, all right," Eddie said excitedly. "The one in the green suit."

"Wait a minute," Malone said. "*Green* suit?"

"Green," Frankie said.

"Sure you're not color-blind?" Malone demanded.

"Green suit," Eddie said, "and sort of reddish hair. I'd know her anyplace. And Malone, she should of won that match."

"How about the other babe?" Malone asked.

"*Lady*," Frankie muttered.

"Never saw her before," Eddie said.

Malone said, "Well, thanks, kids, and don't worry any more. Hope you enjoyed the show." He went back to von Flanagan and said, "C'mon, let's take a lady wrestler out to supper."

Von Flanagan's eyes brightened. He said, "Are you kidding?"

"Who," Malone said, "me? Where do you think I got the tickets?"

She was waiting for them, superbly dressed and made up, and — so was Daphne. "I hope you don't mind if I bring a friend along." She introduced Daphne.

"I hope you don't mind if I do," Malone said. He introduced von Flanagan.

Nadine, it seemed, had her car. They took off for a restaurant on the near North Side. Malone fingered the remaining ten dollar bill, and hoped for the best. Lady wrestlers probably ate like horses.

Daphne ordered a bowl of clear soup and a small glass of domestic wine.

Nadine ordered a bowl of cornflakes and a glass of skim milk.

"Got to keep our weight down," Daphne explained. She not only looked big, and pretty, she also looked charming and smart.

"Next match, Pittsburg," Nadine said, "and Daphne is the winner."

"We take turns," Daphne added.

"From looking at you in the ring," von Flanagan said, "I'd never of thought you were the best of friends."

"Little do you know," Nadine said. "In fact I've been staying with Daphne since my husband threw me out." Suddenly she shut up fast.

Malone looked at her and decided to pitch an inside curve. He hoped she wouldn't pitch the bowl of cornflakes. The idea in his mind had not only jelled now, it had whipped cream and a strawberry on it.

"Miss Sapphire," he said in a light voice, "what time last night did you decide to murder your husband — Jackson Kornblum?"

Across the table he could see von Flanagan sober up as though someone had poured oxygen into him.

"It was —" She caught herself. "Why, you stinking —"

Malone ducked the bowl of cornflakes.

"My dear girl," he said, "nothing's going to happen to you, because I'm your lawyer. Now both of you listen to me — and you too, von Flanagan." He turned to Daphne. "You're a good friend of Nadine Sapphire. You knew she'd had trouble with her husband, that he was holding on to ten grand that belonged to her. Am I right?"

"Right so far," Daphne murmured. She had a soft gentle voice.

"You had the bright idea of sending a couple of young punks out to collect that ten grand, even if they had to sap Kornblum — not too hard — to collect it. Right again?"

"Go to the head of the class," Daphne said.

Malone said, "I'm just making this up as I go along, but I know it's

right, and it has to check. You used to drop in at Joe the Angel's for an occasional glass of wine. It occurred to you he might get you some fast hired help, and he did. You briefed the kids, and went back to your apartment. You told Nadine what you'd done. But Nadine got to brooding. She didn't trust your hired help. And maybe she'd found out that with Jackson Kornblum dead, she'd inherit half a million bucks, cash money." He turned his head. "Am I right, Nadine?"

She called him a very unpleasant name.

"Say that again," the little lawyer told her, "and I won't take your case."

Von Flanagan said "Malone, what gives?"

"You missed the opening of the picture," Malone said, "but I'm giving you the ending of it. The least you can do, with my cleaning up your case for you, is to buy us a drink."

Von Flanagan waved to the waiter and gave the order. Two double ryes with beer chasers, one glass of milk, one plain seltzer water.

"Nadine," Malone said, "drove out to the house, went in through the window, sapped her husband, picked up the money, and came back to your apartment, Daphne. She told you what she'd done, and you knew what a fool she'd been. Daphne, there have been times in my life when I've wished I had a friend like you. You took Nadine's car-keys, and the money. You drove up to the house, got in, put the money back in the tin box, and decided to dispose of the body."

Von Flanagan said hoarsely "Malone, is any of this probable truth?"

Malone hoped it was, and didn't answer. He smiled at Daphne and went on talking. "Why did you pick Rico DiAngelo's undertaking parlor?"

She smiled at him. Malone decided he liked Daphne. "The name DiAngelo stuck in my mind. I was going through the undertaking parlors in the classified, and I saw DiAngelo. I stuck the little jerk's body in the back of the car, broke into the place, and parked him on the slab."

"His clothes?" Malone asked.

"They're at the bottom of the drainage canal. I thought it might help if he weren't identified too soon. And the logical place to hide a body is in an undertaking parlor. I hope it didn't make Mr. DiAngelo too much trouble."

"It didn't," Malone assured her. Suddenly he felt very tired. "Nadine, did you know your husband had about half a million dollars you would inherit?"

"I—" She shut up fast and reached for the sugar bowl.

"Don't throw it," Malone advised her, "it's against the law. And you're talking to your lawyer now." He reached across the table and patted her hand. "Don't worry, my dear, I've never lost a client yet."

She relaxed a little. Her eyes smiled at him, just slightly. "I didn't mean to kill him. I just wanted to get my ten thousand dollars back. I guess I hit him a little too hard."

"You don't know your own strength," Malone said in a sympathetic voice.

"Just like you said, I told Daphne. I went to sleep. She came back and told me not to worry, but she'd gotten your name from Mr. Joe DiAngelo. I thought it would be smart if you went out with me and helped discover the body. I thought it would be there, and the money gone, and I could blame it on these two young punks. But there was no body, and the money was there."

Von Flanagan cleared his throat, drank half a glass of water, and said, "Miss Sapphire, I'm sorry, but you're under arrest. I'll have to take you with me."

"Charge?" Malone asked.

"Murder," von Flanagan said. "She'll sign a confession."

"She'll sign nothing," Malone said. "I'm her lawyer, and if there's any pushing around done, I'll tell your mother-in-law about that night in the dice house in Wheaton —"

"You'll be treated kindly," von Flanagan told Nadine, "and you can see your lawyer first thing in the morning." He turned to Malone. "How did you know all this?"

"I didn't," Malone said. "I just guessed."

Two minutes later Daphne waved at the waiter, ordered a drink for Malone, and a seltzer for herself. She said, "You're really going to defend Nadine?" Malone nodded.

"You probably need a retainer. She left money with me — in case anything like this happened." She opened her purse. There were the ten thousand-dollar bills. "Don't worry, they're safe with me." She slipped one of them into his hand. "Can you get her off?"

Malone looked at her, at the thousand-dollar bill. He found a slip of paper and a pen in his pocket, and wrote her a receipt.

"I never lost a client yet," he told her, gazing at her. There was a certain fascination about Daphne.

"Tomorrow night," she said, "at Joe the Angel's, at eight. I want to know how things worked out." Her eyes swam at him. "And, meantime —"

Two hours before dawn he dropped in at Joe the Angel's, ordered a fast rye and beer, and laid a thousand-dollar bill on the counter.

"No change," Joe said.

"Okay, I owe you," Malone said.

Joe stuck the bill in the cash register and said, "You get your change in the morning." He poured out the rye and beer. "What are you singing about?"

Malone looked up at him happily. "Life — can be wonderful. This program comes to you through the courtesy of the Sunshine Florists, whose cheerful thought for this morning is: tomorrow will be another day."

BY
JONATHAN CRAIG

"A man your age," the girls said, as if Charlie were too old to care any more. Only Charlie knew the truth that was hidden in

The Scrapbook

Old Charlie Stevens had just finished trucking the last of the big cartons out to the loading platform, and now he sat on his shipping table, turning a stub of black marking crayon over and over in his short, spatulate fingers and watching Lois Anderson adjust the seams of her stockings.

A girl should wear a garter belt instead of round garters, he reflected, and then her seams wouldn't always be twisting around. Still . . . round garters, if a girl wore them up as high on her legs as Lois wore them,

looked a damn sight prettier; you had to give them that.

Lois glanced up at him through her lashes, and smiled. "Shame, Charlie," she laughed. "A man your age."

He grinned at her, and looked away, and felt the crayon break between his fingers. She didn't think of him as a man at all, he knew. She made the same mistake all the rest of them did, the mistake he wanted them to make; she thought he was too old to notice a girl's legs. Or anything else.

Too old to notice, and too old to do anything about it even if he did.

He stared hard at the calendar over the zoning chart, trying to keep the amusement out of his eyes. She wouldn't have her skirt hiked up like that if she knew about the scrapbook, he thought. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his silver-rimmed glasses, and then ran the handkerchief back across his bald head and mopped at the wrinkled, sagging flesh back of his neck.

Lois smoothed her skirt down and came over to lean against the edge of the shipping table. "You got a cigarette, Charlie?" she asked.

He gave her a cigarette, and lit it for her, watching the way she sucked the smoke deep into her lungs.

"I don't know how you do it," Lois said.

"Do what?"

"All those heavy boxes." She shook her head. "I mean . . . well, a man your age, and all."

"Sixty-one isn't so old," Charlie said. "And besides, handling weight is more knowing how than muscle. You sort of let the weight work for you."

"Well," she said, "anyhow, your vacation starts tomorrow, doesn't it?"

He nodded. She didn't believe he was only sixty-one, he knew.

"We'll miss you while you're gone," she said. "Everyone around here likes you a lot, Charlie."

He didn't say anything. He knew they liked him at Morton's. Everybody from Mr. Morton himself right on down the line liked him. Next to Mr. Morton, he'd been here longer, and worked harder, than anybody else. And each year, at vacation time, Mr. Morton had come back to the shipping department to tell him to enjoy himself, and to give him an envelope with a fifty-dollar vacation bonus.

Lois dropped her cigarette to the floor and ground it out with her heel. "Got to get back," she said. "The ladies' room is always jammed up at quitting time, and that's why I had to come back here to —"

"Sure," Charlie said. He wondered what Lois' pretty face would look like if he were to take her to his furnished room on West Seventy-third Street and show her the scrapbook. She looked a little like that girl in St. Louis. Let's see . . . that was back in '47. Her name had been Diane Benton, and he could remember exactly how she had looked

when he killed her, and how the picture on the front page of the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* had been blown up from an amateur snapshot, so that you couldn't really tell how pretty she was. But there'd been a better picture of her the next day, and that was the one he'd put in his scrapbook.

"Have fun on your vacation, Charlie," Lois said. She smiled at him. "And don't give the girls too bad a time." She moved off toward the door that led to the front office.

He watched the lithe swing of her hips until the door closed behind her. Then he slid off the shipping table and went over to his locker to change into his street clothes. A real pretty girl, he thought. She did look like that girl in St. Louis, all right, but she walked like the one in Baltimore. A girl didn't have to roll her hips that way, and if she did she was really asking for it. But with Lois it was force of habit; she wouldn't waste the motion on him.

He'd just finished knotting his tie when Jack Morton came through the door and strode toward him. He nodded and said, "Hello, Mr. Morton."

"*Mr.* Morton, hell! It's *Jack*, goddam it! Can't you ever remember, you old —" He broke off, and laughed, and slapped Charlie on the shoulder. "Well, you all ready?"

"Just about," Charlie said.

"Good," Morton said. He reached into his inside coat pocket and handed Charlie an envelope. "Just got a minute, Charlie, to tell you to have fun." He winked. "I figured you could use a little extra liquor money."

"Thanks," Charlie said.

Morton glanced at his watch. "Forget about this place," he said. "Just concentrate on having a good time. Okay?"

"All right," Charlie said.

Morton slapped him on the shoulder again and hurried back the way he had come.

Charlie turned and picked up his lunch bucket and walked the length of the shipping room to punch the time clock that was reserved for himself and the porter.

Forty-five minutes later, Charlie closed the door of his third-floor room behind him, and locked it, and went directly to the closet where he kept his heavy, brass-bound trunk. He dragged the trunk to the middle of the floor, found his key, and knelt down beside it. The padlock in the hasp was nearly as large as his palm, and it was the most expensive he had been able to find. He unlocked it, lifted the tray from the top of the trunk, and reached down beneath a layer of smaller books for his scrapbook.

It was an unusually large book, large enough to hold entire newspaper pages without folding them. He sat cross-legged on the floor, opened the book, and stared at the beautiful girl looking back at him from the front page of the Buffalo *Courier-Express*.

Elaine Bishop had been the first,

and one of the youngest. Seventeen. The newspaper had yellowed in the eight years since he'd killed Elaine, but he needed no newspaper photograph to remember how lovely she had been. And the words in the long account of what the *Courier-Express* called ". . . the most brutal sex murder in the history of New England" were as clearly imprinted on his mind as they were in the newspaper columns.

He could remember every detail of Elaine Bishop's murder, and of the seven others that had followed it, as vividly as he could remember his trip home on the Seventh Avenue subway this evening.

He thumbed through the scrapbook slowly and lovingly. Eight of them, he thought. And every one of them a real beauty. One of them for every vacation he'd taken in the last eight years, and no two of them from the same city. He'd spent that first real vacation in Boston, and in the years that followed he had gone to St. Louis and Baltimore and Richmond and Philadelphia and Cleveland and Pittsburgh and Miami. Eight beautiful young girls in eight years, and never a single hitch. Two of the girls had succeeded in clawing him a little, before he killed them, and that girl in Richmond — that Gloria Roberts — had kneed him pretty bad; but that was all.

He'd always been able to come back to New York feeling like another man, ready to start planning and saving for the vacation next year. And along with his savings and plans, his anticipation had always mounted steadily until, when vacation time finally came, the urgent need to rape and kill had become the only thing in his mind. Between vacations, he talked to only the girls at Morton's.

It had been wonderful to come back to his job and listen to what everybody said about the horrible out-of-town sex crimes. He'd always gotten such a kick out of shaking his head sadly with the best of them, and muttering about what he'd like to do with such a fiend — if he were a younger man, of course.

He glanced at the alarm clock on the dresser. He'd better get started, he thought. He didn't want to get to Washington, D. C. too late. . . .

Charlie turned the rented Plymouth into Massachusetts Avenue and drove slowly along beneath the high-vaulted arch of the overhanging trees. At three o'clock in the morning, Washington, D. C. was more like a country town than it was a city. And after the surge and thrust and pace of Manhattan, Charlie found the quiet, deserted streets irritating. He remembered that someone had told him Washington, after midnight, was like a cemetery with lights.

He turned the corner at Sixteenth Street, and pulled to the curb. He lit a cigarette and smoked it down, and had almost decided to give up for the night, when a Buick con-

vertible passed him and pulled to a stop a few yards ahead. He watched while a girl jumped from the car, slammed the door behind her angrily, and started up the walk to an apartment house. The man behind the wheel of the Buick called something after her in a bitter voice, raced the motor and jerked the car away from the curb. It careened around the next corner.

Charlie could see the girl plainly in the light from the medieval lanterns at either side of the apartment house entrance. She was young, and she was pretty, and the body beneath her tight-waisted summer dress brought a taut, dry feeling to his throat. He slid across the front seat and opened the door and walked toward the apartment house. He didn't hurry, and the look he cast both ways along the street was casual.

The girl was standing in front of the elevator doors. Her finger was still on the self-service button, and she was even younger and prettier than Charlie had thought. She glanced at him with wide-set, angry blue eyes, and then jabbed at the button again. Her face was flushed, and her sharp, high breasts quivered a little with the movement of her body as she stepped back suddenly to look up at the floor indicator.

After that first glance, she paid no further attention to Charlie. Why should she? he thought. An old man . . . too old for anything.

He was close enough to her to smell the clean, soapy scent of her hair before she noticed him again. And then it was too late.

There was no sound. He stood back and looked down at her, and gently massaged his right thumb with the fingers of his left hand. It took a lot of pressure to keep your thumb in a girl's throat long enough to kill her. But it was the best way, he'd discovered. He didn't like to mark up a pretty girl any more than he had to — anyhow, not till later. Right now, and for the next hour or so, he wanted this blue-eyed teen-ager exactly the way she was.

He picked her up and carried her to the door. When he was certain the street was clear he walked rapidly to the Plymouth and put the girl on the back seat. Midway between Washington and Baltimore there was an abandoned side road he knew about. It would be as good a place as any.

On his first morning back at work, Charlie punched the time clock and walked out into the main office in search of Lois Anderson. He could always depend on Lois for a highly emotional reaction to his murders, and he liked the way she had of inventing little details of her own to make the story even more sensational. He found her near the water cooler, talking to two of the other girls. There was a folded newspaper under her arm.

"Welcome back, Charlie," Lois said, and then, in almost the same breath, "Isn't it horrible?"

Charlie nodded and drew a paper cup of water. "What kind of a man would do a thing like that?" he said, and shook his head. "Inhuman, that's what it is."

Lois glanced at him quickly. "I mean about the fire, Charlie. The one in the tenement over in Brooklyn."

"Fire?" Charlie said.

"You know. Last night. Two people dead, and three more of them not expected to live."

"Oh," Charlie said. He dropped the paper cup in the receptacle and cleared his throat. "I thought you meant about that girl in Washington. If you ask me, a fiend like that should . . ." He let his voice trail off, glowering at the floor.

"That was pretty bad, all right," Lois said. "But they'll get him sooner or later." She unfolded the newspaper and pointed to a photograph on the first page. "Those firemen take some terrible chances, don't they? Look at this one here, on the top of the ladder."

One of the other girls said, "Just think of it. Those poor people. Like rats in a trap."

Charlie drew another cup of water and drank it slowly. "They said that maniac in Washington killed her one place and . . . well, you know . . . he did that someplace else. I didn't get a chance to read much about it." He looked at Lois expectantly.

"They'll get him," Lois said. She folded the newspaper again. "The city ought to do something about all those firetraps. They ought to make the landlords put in fire escapes for every room." The other girls nodded, and walked back toward their desks.

Charlie crumpled his paper cup into a small ball and rolled it around in his clenched fist. "I read that girl's name, but I can't remember it."

"Who?" Lois said.

"The one in Washington," Charlie said. "The one —"

"Oh," Lois said. "Well, it doesn't make much difference now. Look, Charlie, Mr. Morton told me he wanted to see you as soon as you got in this morning. I forgot till just now."

Charlie stared at the newspaper beneath Lois' arm, and nodded. "All right," he said.

"It's nice having you back, Charlie," Lois said, and walked over toward the bank of bookkeeping machines.

Charlie stared after her a moment, feeling a strange sort of emptiness inside him. He let his breath out slowly and started toward Mr. Morton's office. That Lois wouldn't be so interested in fires if she knew who she'd just been talking to, he thought. And those other girls, too. Getting all worked up over a little fire. If they knew they'd been standing just two feet from . . . He remembered he was still holding the paper cup, and tossed it toward the nearest wastebasket.

He opened the door to Mr. Morton's office and stepped inside.

Morton looked up and smiled.

"Good to see you back, Charlie," he said. "Things really got fouled up while you were gone. The guy we got to take your place didn't know his backside from a hole in the ground." He picked up a handful of bills of lading. "See what you can do to straighten these out, eh?"

Charlie took the bills of lading. There was a newspaper on Morton's desk, he saw. And it was the right one. It was the one with the girl's picture on the first page.

He gestured toward the newspaper with his free hand. "An awful thing."

"What's that?" Morton asked. "And Charlie, about those —"

"That girl getting it that way in Washington," Charlie said. "An awful thing." He fixed his eyes on the knot in Morton's tie. "You've got a daughter about the same age,haven't you, Mr. Morton? About eighteen?"

"Sixteen," Morton said. "There's a couple of back orders in that stack, Charlie. See if the stuff's come through yet."

Charlie moistened his lips. "If I was that girl's dad, I'd spend the rest of my life hunting the guy that did it. And when I found him . . ." He looked at Morton and smiled grimly. "You say your girl's sixteen, Mr. Morton?"

Morton lifted a sheet of paper from his desk and extended it to Charlie. "Here's one more, Charlie. Got loose from the others somehow."

Charlie took the bill of lading. The palms of his hands were moist now; the air in here was too close and warm.

Morton looked at him questioningly. "Everything okay, Charlie?"

Charlie tucked the bills of lading beneath his arm and dried his palms against his trouser legs. "Sure," he said. "Everything's fine, Mr. Morton."

Morton rattled some papers on his desk. "I guess that's it, then, Charlie."

Charlie nodded and left the office. On his way back to the shipping department he stopped at the water cooler for another cup of water. For the first time in years he was not in the mood to work. Everything seemed wrong somehow. It had never been this way before when he'd come back from his vacation.

He went to his shipping table and tried to work on the bills of lading. But it was no good. He couldn't concentrate, and half the time the figures blurred before his eyes so that he couldn't see them at all. He put the bills of lading aside and began shifting the heavy cartons from one end of the room to the other. They didn't need shifting, but it gave him something to do with his hands, an excuse to bring his muscles into play. He worked savagely, building up a sweat. After an hour of it, he felt no better than he had before.

They'd cheated him, by God. Lois, and Mr. Morton, and the rest of them. A fire in a tenement and a bunch of fouled-up bills of lading, and they forgot all about what had

happened in Washington. What was the good in doing what he'd done if they didn't even want to talk about it? Hell, they'd talked it all out before he got back. That was it. They'd talked it all out of their systems Friday, and here it was Monday — and now all the hell they cared about was a couple of burned-up bastards in a tenement and a bunch of screwed-up bills of lading. By God, they'd talk out of the other side of their face if he ever spread that scrapbook out in front of them!

And those girls. Nine of them now. They'd had their pictures in the papers. Every one of them. But he had not. He was responsible for all the attention they'd had. Millions of people had looked at their pictures, read about them. And what had it got him? Nothing. If other people didn't know you were responsible, it didn't mean a thing.

He took off his glasses and wiped them, and then he went back out to the main office. He went over to Lois, breathing heavily, conscious of the sweat that crawled along his ribs and the insides of his arms.

Lois glanced up at him and smiled. "I'm real busy, Charlie . . ."

Charlie nodded. "I know. But I got to thinking." The inside of his mouth felt drawn and dry. "What kind of a guy do you figure he was?"

She frowned. "Who, Charlie?"

"That guy in Washington," he said tightly. "The one that killed that little girl. What kind of a guy do you figure he was?"

"How would I know?" she said. "For heaven's sake, Charlie. . . . Can't you see I'm busy?"

"But not too busy to talk about that fire," Charlie said. "You weren't too busy to talk about that, Lois."

Her eyes widened. "Charlie"! What's wrong with you?" He turned his back on her and strode toward the street door. There was only one thing to do now, he knew.

He hailed the first taxi that cruised past him, and gave the driver the number of his rooming house.

When Charlie got back to Morton's, he was more excited than he had ever been before. Everything was going to be different now. No one in the history of the country had ever done what he had. He had read hundreds of cases, but nobody before had even come close to him. His name would go down for all time. And not after he was dead, either, by God. Not after he couldn't enjoy it.

He went straight to Lois Anderson's desk and slammed the big scrapbook down in front of her. She glanced at it, and then looked up at him, puzzled. "Charlie, what —"

"It was me," Charlie said. "I killed them. I killed every goddam one of them!" He knew he was shouting now, and didn't care.

He looked about him. Every face in the room was turned toward him.

"Come here, you bastards!" Charlie yelled. "Come here and look at this!"

MUGGED AND PRINTED

ERSKINE CALDWELL is the world-famous author of *God's Little Acre*, *Tobacco Road* and many other best-selling novels and stories. Over thirty million copies of his books have been sold throughout the world. Born in Georgia, scene of many of his books, he's lived in almost every state in the Union and, besides has also held such assorted jobs as mill-laborer, cotton-picker, stagehand and cook, has attended two universities. This diverse background gives him a sharp insight into all types of human behavior — as you'll see in his quietly terrifying *The Motive*.

EVAN HUNTER recently showed up on a radio program in New York to discuss a Western short story he'd written, and, he says, "Nobody was more surprised than I was." Though his fame comes mainly from detective and crime stories like his latest Matt Cordell novelette, *The Death Of Me*, in this issue, and his novels *The Evil Sleep* and *Don't Crowd Me*, he has also written Westerns, science-fiction, adventure and practically every other type of story. He claims his agent "nags me into doing these things when I'd much rather be sleeping."

RAY BRADBURY has been described as a "twentieth-century Thoreau," and "the finest young writing talent in any field today," among other complimentary comments, by a long series of reviewers — the latest being those for his new book, *The Golden Apples Of The Sun*. Though the main portion of his writing output is science-fiction and fantasy, he's written many crime stories which are tops in their field. The latest, *The Millionth Murder*, shows Bradbury at the top of his style in a shocking story.

RICHARD DEMING, after writing two novels about Manville Moon (*The Gallows In My Garden* and *Tweak The Devil's Nose*), decided to give Moon a temporary vacation for his third book, *Justice Has No Sword*. The fact that this one was enthusiastically praised by editors seems to prove that Deming's as fine a writer off-trail as he is when Moon is around. If you'd like further proof, read his latest novelette, *Bonus Cop* in this issue, which is a tough, big-city story of government corruption.

CRAIG RICE (*Life Can Be Horrible*) informs us that the character of John J. Malone, the world-famous Chicago lawyer, was drawn from a real lawyer she once knew — "whom," she says, "I want to defend me if I ever commit a murder." • RICHARD MARSTEN's terse, documentary *Accident Report* is based, he tells us, on experience plus a tremendous amount of research, like that which goes into all his stories. • JONATHAN CRAIG (*The Scrapbook*) started life as a traveling pianist with a small band, but soon discovered that "writing is much more interesting," and has been doing his fine stories ever since, to the accompaniment of "a small murmur of praise and a tiny patter of helpful checks." • HUNT COLLINS likes to work in the short vein because "you can get much more effect in a small space — as if stories were tight-packed explosives." A good example is his latest, *The Molested*.

IN THIS ISSUE:

DEATH Famed author ERSKINE CALDWELL, who wrote *God's Little Acre* and *Tobacco Road*, draws a terrifying portrait of a woman with only one way out in *The Motive*, and RAY BRADBURY'S *The Millionth Murder* sketches the death of a world — and of two innocent strangers. Matt Cordell is back this month, in EVAN HUNTER'S *The Death Of Me*. Cordell plays three roles in this story: he's a detective, a killer — and a corpse.

DRAGNET The murder of one honest cop in a big city causes a gang revolution in RICHARD DEMING'S *Bonus Cop* — and the death of a traffic patrolman, in RICHARD MARSTEN'S *Accident Report*, starts a methodical and realistic manhunt. JACK M. BAGBY, in *Chase By Night*, tells of a different kind of hunt — one man against an unknown gang in a chase that can only end in death.

DANGER CRAIG RICE'S John J. Malone is on hand in *Life Can Be Horrible*, and this time the little Chicago lawyer is mixed up with a stray corpse, two juvenile delinquents, and a pair of feminine lady wrestlers. FLETCHER FLORA'S *Fair Game* presents a man who is in danger — and who has to kill the person protecting him from death.

DAMES *Scrapbook*, by JONATHAN CRAIG, gives you a man with a strange passion for dead women. And HUNT COLLINS tells the unusual story of a girl, in *The Molested*.

DIVIDENDS All that — plus VINCENT H. GADDIS' *Crime Cavalcade* and another realistic *Portrait Of A Killer* by DAN SONTUP — sets the stage for a stellar selection of stories.

MANHUNT NOVEMBER